

Planning Statement

Conversion of former Methodist Chapel to Dwelling

Whiston, Stoke on Trent

November 2023

Conversion to a single dwelling – Former Methodist Chapel, Whiston

Project	Former Methodist Chapel, Whiston, Stoke on Trent, ST10 2JE
Client	Mr Justin Clarkson
Reference	1926
Project Team	Claire Preston
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Reviewed by	Jim Malkin

Document Produced by:

JMI Planning Limited
62 Carter Street
Uttoxeter
Staffs
ST14 8EU

www.jmiplanning.com

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 JMI Planning is a Midlands based town planning consultancy. Its directors are chartered town planners with over 30 years' combined experience in both the public and private sector.
- 1.2 The author of this appraisal, Claire Preston, has 14 years' experience as a planner in the private sector and she is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.
- 1.3 This statement is accompanied by an Access Appraisal completed by ADC Infrastructure as well as the necessary site location plans.

2 Site and Planning History

- 2.1 The application site comprises the vacant Methodist Chapel located on the A52 Ashbourne Road on the edge of the settlement of Whiston, some 2.5 miles from Cheadle. The chapel has been formally closed since July 2022 owing to a dwindling congregation. A Presale Evaluation Report was undertaken at the request of Staffordshire Moorlands Methodist Circuit.
- 2.2 The Methodist and Anglican chapels in Whiston did at one time alternate joint worship. This stopped with the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and did not start up again. Remaining members now worship at one of the other chapels that form part of the Staffordshire Moorlands Methodist Circuit.
- 2.3 Following closure of the chapel, the building was marketed and then subsequently made available at auction where it was bought by the applicant Mr Clarkson.

- 2.4 The existing building is an attractive red brick and tile building set within a small curtilage. Pedestrian access is provided to the front of the building off Ashbourne Road. The boundaries of the property are delineated by a traditional low stone wall and established trees and hedgerows to the rear of the building.



Figure 1 – Whiston Methodist Chapel

- 2.5 The building is located on the edge of the settlement of Whiston and is adjoined by more dispersed linear residential development as well as agricultural uses. A public footpath to the west, northwest of the site allows safe pedestrian access to facilities in the village including the golf club and village hall. Surrounding properties are predominantly traditional in style and are a mix of single and two storey dwellings. Relatively new build 3 storey properties are located to the west of the site.
- 2.6 The site is not listed and is not located within a Conservation Area or Green Belt designation.
- 2.7 The site is located in Flood Zone 1 which has a low probability of flooding.

2.8 The site has no recent planning history of relevance to this proposal.

2.9 The site and its surroundings are shown on the following aerial photograph.



Figure 2 - Aerial photograph of site

3 The Proposed Development

3.1 As set out above in paragraph 2.1 the place of worship has been unused owing to a dwindling congregation since July 2022, therefore the Staffordshire Moorlands Methodist Circuit, as part of their Presale Evaluation Report, decided there were better sites for mission and vision and the sale of the building would provide funds for mission elsewhere, therefore Whiston Chapel was put up for sale.

3.2 The building was thereafter purchased by Mr Clarkson who is very keen to ensure that the history and character of the building is maintained.

- 3.3 When considering alternative uses of the building this was one of the key questions as part of the Presale Evaluation Report. The report summarised the building does not shape or give good impression to Circuit or District mission plans. The Circuit discussed using the building for a Community Group, Moorlands HomeLink, but found the location unsuitable therefore there were no alternative uses which the Circuit could use the building.
- 3.4 Its use for another commercial purposes are not considered viable due to the internal layout of the building, small plot and lack of parking. Therefore, the most appropriate future use of the building, and the one that enables the structure to be maintained, is to convert the chapel to a single dwelling.
- 3.5 The scheme seeks to maintain the existing character of the building and there are no external or internal alterations proposed.
- 3.6 Externally the area to the rear and side of the building will be used as private amenity space, with the existing pedestrian access retained to serve the property.
- 3.7 There is no off-street parking available at the property and historically members of the Circuit would have parked to the front of the building or use on-street car parking close to the building on the A52.
- 3.8 The scheme therefore proposes a priority controlled private driveway and vehicle turntable which can accommodate two cars. This element is addressed later in this Statement (paragraph 5.13) and as part of the supporting Access Appraisal prepared by ADC Infrastructure which includes details of pre-application discussions with Staffordshire County Council Highways team.

4 Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 Paragraph 11 advises that at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking, this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date Local Plan; and also in circumstances where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.
- 4.2 Paragraph 60 of the NPPF states a sufficient supply of homes should be delivered to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of home. This can be achieved by ensuring a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed to meet the needs of groups with specific housing requirements.
- 4.3 Paragraph 84 advises that planning decisions in local areas should *enable the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*
- 4.4 Chapter 12 of the Framework houses a number of relevant paragraphs relating to the importance of appropriate design. Paragraph 126 encourages the creation of high quality buildings which raise the quality of the built environment and create better places in which to live and work. Paragraph 130 advises that decision makers should aim to ensure that developments respond to local character and history, reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, and are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

4.5 The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was adopted in 2020 and provides the local planning policies on which development proposals should be assessed. The most relevant policies are as follows:

4.6 Policy H1 – New Housing Development

Policy H1 refers to the replacement of existing dwellings and provides the following guidance in sections 5 and 6 in relation to development in the open countryside and in the green belt:

5) *In the other rural areas in the open countryside, only the following forms of housing development will be permitted;*

- a) *Affordable housing which cannot be met elsewhere, in accordance with Policy H 3.*
- b) *A new dwelling that meets an essential local need, such as accommodation for an agricultural, forestry or other rural enterprise worker, where the need for such accommodation has been satisfactorily demonstrated and that need cannot be met elsewhere.*
- c) *Proposals for replacement dwellings, provided they do not have a significantly greater detrimental impact on the existing character of the rural area than the original dwelling or result in the loss of a building which is intrinsic to the character of the area.*
- d) *The conversion of rural buildings for residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion; or where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets.*

- e) *Proposals to redevelop previously developed land provided it is not of high environmental value.*
 - f) *The subdivision of an existing residential dwelling provided it is not in an isolated location.*
- 6) *When development is located in the Green Belt, national Green Belt Policy will apply.*

4.7 Policy C1 – Creating Sustainable Communities

This policy advises that the Council should seek to:

Resist proposals involving the loss of community facilities unless:

- a) *an alternative facility of the same type and quality that meets the needs of the community is available in the locality or can be provided in an accessible location in the same locality;*

Five Year Land Supply

- 4.8 The most up-to date monitoring statement from the 1st of April 2021¹ shows that the Council is only able to exhibit a land supply of 4.21 years. Therefore, in accordance with paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF and footnote 8 *'for applications involving the provision of housing, situations where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites'*, the tilted balance is therefore engaged.

¹ https://www.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk/media/7190/Housing-Land-Supply-Schedule-17-Feb-2022/pdf/Housing_Land_Supply_Schedule_17_Feb_2022.pdf?m=1645718148490

5 Planning Considerations

Principle of the Proposed Use

- 5.1 The site lies outside of any designated settlement boundary to the edge of the village of Whiston, therefore, in principle terms the most important policy is H1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan.
- 5.2 Policy H1 advises that *the conversion of rural buildings for residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion*. The building is clearly suitable and worthy of retention in the landscape and the scheme retains the architectural character of the former Methodist Chapel. Therefore, the scheme clearly complies with the requirements of policy H1.
- 5.3 Point 3 of Policy CS 1 advises that the loss of community facilities will be resisted unless *an alternative facility of the same type and quality that meets the needs of the community is available in the locality or can be provided in an accessible location in the same locality*. Whiston Community Village Hall is located approximately 400m from the application site, with St Mildreds CoFE located nearby, off Ross Road. The proposal does result in the loss of a Place of Worship; however, the Staffordshire Moorlands Methodist Circuit, as part of their Presale Evaluation Report, deemed the chapel surplus to requirements owing to a dwindling congregation, hence the sale of the building.
- 5.4 The Staffordshire Moorlands Methodist Circuit have a large number of alternative facilities available to worshippers in close proximity to the former Whiston Chapel. Places of Worship within the circuit include, Boundary, Cheadle, Endon, Ipstones, Onecote, Rudyard, Rushton, Cheddleton, Tean, Leek and Wetley Rocks. The closest church to Whiston is Cheadle, which is only 2.5 miles away.

5.5 It is therefore clear that the loss of the Place of Worship will not displace worshippers and the needs of the Methodist community can be adequately met within the local Staffordshire Moorlands Methodist Circuit. The scheme therefore complies with the requirements of policy CS 1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan.

5.6 On this basis, the broad principle of the conversion of the building to a single residential dwelling is supported by Policies H1 and CS 1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, and by the relevant policies of the NPPF.

Impact upon the Character and Appearance

5.7 The key to a successful conversion scheme is to avoid damaging the character of the original building. The scheme therefore retains the original character of the place of worship, whilst making it an attractive and high-quality unit of accommodation.

5.8 There are no external or internal alterations proposed. The scheme will therefore maintain the original character and appearance of the building, thereby protecting its wider appearance in the landscape.

5.9 The proposals will therefore enable the existing building and its special character to be maintained in the streetscene and will, following the conversion of the building to a dwelling, enhance the character and appearance of its surroundings in accordance with Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Residential Amenity

5.10 The building is sited to the edge of the village and is provided with adequate separation to existing residential properties, thereby ensuring that no harm to amenities of the occupiers of existing properties.

- 5.11 With regards to the amenity of future occupiers all habitable rooms are served by at least one window which will allow for adequate natural light to permeate. The property is only provided with a small area of outdoor amenity space, which is sufficient for future occupiers to sit out and hang washing etc...which alongside the provision of the private area to the rear of the building, ensures an area of outdoor space is provided.
- 5.12 The proposal will therefore not give rise to any detrimental impacts on the amenities of neighbouring properties and will provide a high quality and acceptable living environment for future occupiers.

Highway Safety

- 5.13 The building is not provided with any access to the highway, nor is it provided with any designated off-street parking to serve the existing use.
- 5.14 The proposal includes the formation of priority controlled private driveway. Within the site, a car turntable is proposed to the front of the building to accommodate two cars.
- 5.15 Pre-application advice was obtained from Staffordshire County Council (SCC) in regard to the access proposals. SCC have confirmed visibility to the west would be acceptable subject the lowering of the wall adjacent to the existing public right of way. The applicant has since lowered the wall.
- 5.16 SCC acknowledged sufficient visibility can be provided to the east.
- 5.17 The scheme includes a short section of grass verge, converted to a 2m footway to the east of the proposed access, to enable crossing opportunities to the existing footway provision.

- 5.18 The proposed residential use will not result in a material increase in vehicle movements to and from the site, the former use as a Place of Worship would have generated far more vehicular movements and a much greater parking requirement than a single residential dwelling.
- 5.19 The scheme will not result in any highway safety implications and the accompanying Access Appraisal concludes *‘a safe a suitable access with sufficient visibility can be achieved and, therefore, it would be unreasonable to prevent the development on highway grounds’*.

Flood Risk

- 5.20 The site is located in Flood Zone 1 and is therefore not at risk from fluvial flooding.

Ecology

- 5.21 The scheme does not propose any works to the roof of the building and therefore it will not impact adversely on the habitats on protected species.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The application seeks permission for the conversion of the former Methodist Chapel to a single residential dwelling.
- 6.2 As set out above the scheme does not result in the loss of a valued community facility and the Staffordshire Moorlands Methodist Circuit provides a large number of alternative places of worship. The proposal will have a positive overall effect upon the character and appearance of the surroundings and maintains this attractive and permanent building in this edge of village location.

- 6.3 The development would not detrimentally affect the amenities enjoyed by the occupiers of nearby dwellings. The proposal does not impact adversely on the safe and efficient use of the existing highway network and the proposals will not harm protected species or their habitat.
- 6.4 The scheme therefore accords with the requirements of local and national planning policies, and it is respectfully requested that planning permission is granted for the proposal.