

St Giles' Roman Catholic Primary School, Cheadle, Staffs

External Fencing and Gates

18th April, 2024

Design Access Statement

Introduction

This design access statement accompanies a planning application for proposed external fencing and gates on the site of St Giles' RC Primary School, Cheadle, and has been written to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework. Local planning policy was considered.

Use

The current use of the application site is a primary school, the external works areas are identified on drawing no. 2528-33-04. The external works focus on the playground at the front of the school and the installation of a new fence line along the boundary to ensure security to the site. The adjacent churchyard is publicly accessible and the current arrangement comprising solely of a privet hedge, allows easy access to intruders as well as opportunities for pupils to abscond.

Amount

The length of the new fencing extends 54.5 linear metres, at a height of 2m.

Layout

The proposed fencing is to follow the line of the existing low boundary retaining wall between the school driveway and eastern portion of the churchyard, as illustrated on the application drawings. This will minimise any effective reduction of the driveway width. Fence posts will be installed into the ground but adjacent to the face of the low wall and independent of it. It would be possible to remove fence posts in the future if necessary, without any damage to the wall itself.

Appearance

The fencing will comprise of 2000mm bow top railings as shown on drawing no. 2528-33-06. The style is similar in appearance to existing fencing on the site and the colour will be green applied as a polyester powdered coating.

Statement of Historical Significance

This assessment of the building and its setting has been undertaken using 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' and 'The Setting of Heritage Assets', as produced by English Heritage.

Identification of Heritage Assets that may be affected

The two primary assets concerned are St. Giles' Catholic Church (Grade 1 listed) and St. Giles' Catholic Primary School (Grade 2). There are other separately listed smaller structures within the curtilage of the church (boundary wall, gate and monuments), however these are not within close enough proximity to the proposal to be affected. The proposal is to be positioned on the school side of the existing boundary hedge, so the affect on the setting of the Church will be limited.

Assessment of Significance

Historical Value

Much of St. Giles' Primary School displays a high degree of historical value which is mainly associative in nature, with the original school buildings having been designed by the distinguished Gothic Revivalist architect A.W.N. Pugin. Although Pugin's work was largely ecclesiastical and usually more embellished (taking inspiration from middle age 'decorated' styles of gothic), he did to a lesser extent become engaged on associated structures of a more secular use such as dwellings and school buildings. In Pugin's written work 'Contrasts', he promotes this use of the style on secular buildings so projects such as St. Giles' are a fairly rare expression of this.

The historical value of the Church can be assessed as being exceptional – as with the school, the church is strongly associated with Pugin as its architect and 'Master-builder'. Indeed, the church is widely accepted as Pugin's finest work and is often known by the nickname 'Pugin's Gem'. Pugin himself also regarded St. Giles' as his masterpiece and the through the generous and sympathetic sponsorship of the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury, he was afforded the chance to design a building which encapsulated his aspirations for the ideal parish church. According to Pugin, 'Perfect' Cheadle was "...my consolation in all afflictions"

Evidential Value

In terms of evidential value, the school can offer some degree of value in terms of telling us about the Victorian sociological movement to formalise education practices in Britain, with the acceptance by government of responsibility for education of the masses, eventually resulting in the 1870 Education Act. During this period, school-houses were constructed in most villages, although the small size of these buildings is evidential of the fact not all the school-age population of the village would attend and that classes were mixed ages, village schools sometimes just consisting of one or two classrooms. The relationship of the school to its setting and particularly the proximity to the churches is also evidence of the practice during most of the 19th century of government granting funding to religious bodies to build schools, rather than building them directly itself.

Added to this, the building exemplifies Pugin's own views on how the Gothic style could be employed to instil Christian (Catholic) morals upon the general population.

Aesthetics

As a heritage asset, St Giles' Primary School offers moderate aesthetic value however the 1950's extensions to the sides and rear of the original building do somewhat detract from this and prevent it being seen in isolation. The level of detailing employed on the school is fairly utilitarian in comparison to the neighbouring church, employing the use of red brick for the majority of its walls.

It should also be noted that it seems unlikely Pugin considered the School and the Church together as a 'complex' of buildings in the same way that he considered say, the school, Church and Hospital at St. John's in Alton to be. Historic prints and drawings (even by Pugin himself) have always shown the church in isolation, and the quality of materials and architecture are very different between the two buildings. In this way we can dismiss the idea that the two assets generate a collective value or visual dialogue between them.

Impact Assessment of Proposals

The proposed fencing is designed to reinforce an already established boundary line between the school site and the adjacent churchyard. As mentioned previously, the fence is proposed to be installed on the school side of the churchyard boundary. Therefore any visual impact is likely to be limited to views from the school site, as the proposed height of the fence would be similar to that of the hedge and this would obscure the fence when viewed from the churchyard. Impact on the setting of the church would therefore be **negligible**.



Figure 1 – View along the existing driveway with church boundary on the left and school behind camera

Impact on the setting of the school would represent a **minor degree of 'less than substantial' harm**. Being set some distance away from the school building itself, the new railings would not obstruct any views toward the building any more than the existing hedge currently obscures them – it is only when visitors reach the top of the driveway that the full extent of the building is revealed.

DfE School Specification guidance usually requires a perimeter fencing height of 2.4m, however the proposal has been reduced to 2m in this case to mitigate visual impact. The fencing will be powder coated green and once the hedge itself is allowed to grow through the railings (which will be necessary in order to cut it), then the fence will be visually softened.

Any perceived residual harm to the setting of the School can be outweighed by the public benefit afforded by the new fence in the context of the need for the schools to adequately secure their sites in order to comply with its pupil safeguarding responsibilities. There currently exists a clear risk of pupils being able to abscond, or trespassers gaining access through the existing hedged boundary and this is evidenced by holes that appear to have been formed in the hedge for exactly this purpose.



Figure 2 – Hole in existing hedge rendering the school site accessible to intruders.