

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0112
Valid 05/03/2024

**ST JOHNS CHURCH BELLE
VUE ROAD
LEEK**

**CHANGE OF USE TO JOINERY
WORKSHOP / SHOWROOM WITH
ANCILLARY STORE, OFFICE
AND WELFARE FACILITIES
(CLASS E(G)(III))
(FULL - MINOR)**

MAIN ISSUES

- Principle of development
- Design and visual impact
- Highways
- Neighbour amenity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is St. John's Church, Belle Vue Road, Leek. Described as a Mission church (attached to St. Edward's Church, Leek) it is understood that it was built in 1875, consisting of a nave and apsidal chancel with a bell-turret and schoolroom attached. It is understood that it ceased being a school in 1938. The building sits at a visually prominent location at the junction of Belle Vue Road and Mill Street. The view from Mill Street is that of a visually imposing building, set at higher ground level behind a brick retaining wall and grassland. Belle Vue Road rises steeply with the rear of the church building being lower than the road level. As well as the brick wall frontage, boundaries also consist of stone walls, timber fencing and metal railings. There is a detached, pitched roof building within the grounds closest to the road junction. The building sits within a broadly mixed-use area which includes dwellings, factory facilities, public house, social club and museum.

For the purposes of planning policy consideration the application site is located within the Leek Town Development Boundary. The property is not within a Conservation Area and although the building has historical merit and interest, it is not Listed.

PROPOSAL

The proposal is described by the applicants as the change of use of the church building to a joinery workshop/showroom with ancillary store, office and welfare facilities. The plans show no proposed external alterations to the building. Internally the applicant(s) propose to install secondary glazing. The proposed workshop would occupy the former Nave area, the Apse would become a store room and the church hall would become part of the workshop and a showroom area. There are existing toilet facilities, the plans show that these would remain in their current location.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

SS1

Development Principles

SS5	Leek Area Strategy
SD1	Sustainable Use of Resources
E1	New Employment Development
DC1	Design Considerations
DC2	The Historic Environment
C1	Creating Sustainable Communities
T1	Development and Sustainable Transport
Appendix 2	Parking Guidance

Supplementary Planning Guidance

1. Design Principles for Development in the Staffordshire Moorlands

Supplementary Planning Document

1. Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide.

National Planning Policy Framework

Including sections:

2. Achieving sustainable development
6. Building a strong, competitive economy
9. Promoting sustainable transport
12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

94/00432/OLD Two storage buildings with perimeter wall and fence. Approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice. Expired.

Neighbour consultation period. Expired

Public Comments

5 letters/emails of support. Comments summarised as follows:

- Beautiful building will not be left to ruin
- Proposal is sympathetic and unobtrusive
- Exterior of the church will not be changed
- Interior looks to maintain a similar floor plan
- Job creation in the area.
- Local company is securing its future in Leek for its employees.
- Application states daily deliveries. Products will need to leave the site, how will this be achieved.

- There is a gap in the wall adjacent to the houses on Mill Street which was used by residents accessing the Church, there are mature trees / shrubs on site which supports a wealth of wildlife, management of this area moving forwards needs to be determined should a supplementary application be submitted for vehicular access.

Leek Town Council: Support. Comments: At a meeting on 19/03/24 Leek Town Council Planning Committee resolved to support this application. They agreed it will create employment and will mean a historic Leek building will be preserved and potentially open to the public if a retail area is created.

Waste Services (SMDC): No issues regarding waste collections.

Severn Trent Water: No representations received during the statutory consultation period.

Conservation officer (SMDC): No objection.

St John's Church.

MonUID: MST1285.

HER no: 01290.

A mission church attached to the St Edwards Church, Leek. The church was built I 1875 consists of a nave and apsidal chancel and has a bell turret and schoolroom attached. It ceased used as a school in 1938.

Mission Church; Victorian 1875AD-1875 AD.

School; Victorian 1875AD-1875AD.

Full description:

Brick church of 1875 with nave and apsidal chancel, bell turret and school room attached. Built as a church and attached to St Edwards Church.

The mission church of St John the Evangelist in Mill Street was opened in 1875 as a school church. It was built at the expense of John Robinson of Westwood Hall whom also paid for the extensions in 1881. A school established in 1868 as a branch of St Edwards schools became the school church of St John opened in 1875. A separate infants department was established in 1882. In 1930 St Johns was a mixed infants school. It became a junior school in 1931 and was closed in 1938. The building continued then after to be used as a church.

SST3642 The Victoria History of the Counties of England.

No objection. However, whilst I have no issue with a change of use no alterations changes new works or repairs to the interior and exterior fabric of the monument are to be undertaken without prior consent and or communications from myself. Consequently I would like to invite this as a condition due to the well survived condition of the building and to ensure its longevity and preservation in its current state.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Recommendation Summary: Acceptance

Site Visit Conducted on: 27-Mar-2024

Application is to convert a former church to a joinery workshop/showroom. Additional information was received 9th May 2024 detailing how deliveries and collections would be handled. There is no off street parking proposed, though none is available for the existing use. Site is located just outside of town centre and is in a sustainable location. The business is existing and has existing local staff. There is no vehicular access to the site, for the existing or proposed use. Proposals for deliveries and collections have been considered by the applicant and will be supervised by staff to ensure pedestrian safety. This statement should be adhered to. Proposal will relocate an existing local business within the town and bring a disused building back into use. Current records show that there was 1 personal injury collision

(PIC) on A523 or Belle Vue within 50metres of the site in the previous five years. Although all PICs are regrettable, the overall volume of collisions does not suggest there are any existing safety problems that would be exacerbated by the proposed development.

Environmental Health: No objections subject to conditions.

A noise assessment has been undertaken by Peak Acoustics Ref. 1005243NR dated 10th June 2024. It determines without mitigation being installed adverse noise disturbance would be caused by the proposed workshop. The assessment proposes significant noise mitigation to be installed into the glazing units and roof ref. section 6. This mitigation should be completed in full prior to first use of the site. A condition is advised below requiring that the rating level of noise does not exceed current background levels which are set at 45db La90.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

The Design and Access Statement informs that the application has been made by G F Cabinet Makers who 'are an independent and family run business which has been established since 2005.' The Design and Access Statement also informs that the company 'specialises in bespoke kitchens and furniture and have a team of highly experienced craftsman, skilled in a mix of traditional and modern cabinet making skills, hand painting and finishing. 'It is understood that there are currently 7 full-time staff and that the relocation to St John's Church would allow the business to relocate from rented to owned premises, in order to provide stability in the long-term for the business.

Local Plan policy SS1 stipulates that the council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands. The policy also gives support for increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment. Policy SS5 supports employment growth by the retention and growth of existing businesses in Leek. Local Plan policy E1 concerns itself with supporting and improving the local economy, including meeting identified business needs.

The proposal is for the relocation of an existing business to allow the company to purchase their own premises rather than renting a building. It is understood that this will allow more stability for the continued operation of the business which can only be considered a benefit. The use of the building for the workshop hereby proposed would not lead to any harm to the character of the area. It has already been established that the site is within a mixed-use area therefore a business being located within this part of the town is not introducing a completely new use (commercial) to the area. The site is within a sustainable location within the town settlement boundary.

The loss of the existing church use must also be considered. Local Plan policy C1 seeks to retain or enhance existing community uses, resisting proposals which would involve the loss of a community facility. Exceptions to this include where '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; or a viability appraisal including a marketing exercise by a qualified professional demonstrates that there are no options for continued or shared use as any type of community facility which are financially viable and it can be demonstrated that loss of the facility would not disadvantage local residents.'

The Design and Access Statement informs that the church closed in March 2018 due to an issue with the heating system. We are told that a building inspection found the heating system to be inadequate and dangerous and that the upgrading work would be expensive and outside of the budget of the church owners. The Local Planning Authority is informed that the '15

strong congregation' transferred to St. Edward's Church. In addition to this information is a statement from local estate agent 'Bury and Hilton' advising of the following..

'This property went on the market on 17th November 2022 and generated a reasonable amount of interest initially with 26 viewings of the property taking place by prospective purchasers. Offers were received, albeit lower than the asking price, but all offers were subject to obtaining change of use to either commercial or residential. No interest was shown at all from any party who wished to use the premises as a communal facility.'

There is clear policy support for this proposal. The application has demonstrated that there are alternative facilities of the same type and quality in the locality and a marketing exercise has been carried out. Policy C1 requires only one of the tests (alternative facilities or marketing) to be carried out, this application presents information on both. It is concluded that there are no 'in principle' objections to the scheme.

Design and visual impact

Local Plan policy DC1 concerns itself with good design requiring developments to respect their surroundings by considering matters such as scale, height, layout, siting etc. DC1 also seeks the protection of the amenity of an area by considering matters including (but not necessarily limited to) daylight, visual impact, noise and pollution. Policy DC2 refers to development within historic areas. Whilst the application site is not within a Conservation Area and the Church itself is not Listed, the building is considered to have historical interest and merit. It is reasonable to consider the application building as a non-designated heritage asset, Local Plan policy DC2 seeks to conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets. Chapter 16 of The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) concerns itself with conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Whilst the church is not listed, it does have heritage merit and therefore in accordance with paragraph 209 of the NPPF (which concerns Non Designated Heritage Assets) a 'balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.'

The application does not propose any external alterations to the building which is welcomed. The lack of any external change ensures that there is no wider visual impact upon the surrounding area, the building will retain its existing visual prominence and will not result in any harmful impact upon its historic character. Internally there would be the addition of secondary glazing. The submission does reference removal of the church organ, whilst this is unfortunate it is again noted that the building is not Listed and the organ feature does not have any statutory protection. A condition to restrict any external alterations is considered reasonable in order to protect the character and integrity of this non-designated heritage asset.

Highways

There is no onsite parking and this proposal will not provide any. The building has been operating as a church for many years with no car park and arguably the comings and goings associated with a community church use has the potential to generate a significant number of trips. The application informs that there are currently 7 full-time staff members, this is a significantly lower number than the potential number of people using a church hall facility.

The architect has submitted a Delivery and Service Management Plan to which the Highways officer has no concerns and he does not object to the scheme overall. No conditions are requested. The highways consultation response can be read in full within the 'Consultations' section of this report. No highway issue is raised and there is compliance with relevant parts of Policy DC1.

Although the Highway Authority suggest that the submitted Delivery and Service Management Plan, be adhered to, they do not request a condition to secure this. It is considered that eh document is unenforceable as it relates to the public highway and not the site itself. The only

access into the site is through the pedestrian gate on the Belle Vue side of the building. The access has been discussed with the architect who confirms that the applicant will be able to access the building satisfactorily using just the pedestrian gate and that no alterations are necessary. In the absence of any highway safety concerns raised by the Highway Authority, it is considered that the development is acceptable.

Neighbour amenity

There are a number of residential properties near to St. John's Church. Letters of support have been received from members of the public, one of which is from an occupant of an adjacent property. No objections have been received from members of the public. No external alterations are proposed so there is no need to consider any overbearing/overlooking issues. Potential noise impact must be considered. The Environmental Health officer did initially object to the application on the basis that insufficient information had been provided to assess the noise impacts of the development on the significant number of residents in close vicinity. The officer also commented that there would likely be loud noise created in the premises for example from mechanical saws, planers and hammering. These concerns were forwarded to the architect who commissioned a Noise Impact Assessment from Peak Acoustics. The Environmental Health officer now supports the scheme and his detailed comments can be found within the 'Consultations' section of this report. With conditions in place there is no conflict with the relevant parts of Policies DC1 and SD4.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

For the reasons outlined within this report, it is recommended that the application is approved subject to conditions.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Conditional approval

Case Officer: Lisa Jackson

Recommendation Date: 06.12.2024

X 

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council