

Conservation Team Advice

Date: 22nd May 2025
Application Ref: SMD/2025/0179
Site Address: Gorsty Hill United Reform Church, Gorsty Hill Road, Upper Tean
Proposal: Change of use of part of the building from church community room to ground floor flat

Heritage assets affected:		
Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☒	Upper Tean Conservation Area
Non-Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☐	

Conservation Advice

Summary of Significance

The proposal would be situated in Upper Tean Conservation Area, which was designated for its rural industrial origins and transformation from cottage industry to factory production through the 18th and 19th centuries. Tape weaving was established in the village and the mills were dominant part of the skyline, but have since been converted and enclosed by residential development. With the exception of mill buildings, buildings are typically 2- to 3-storeys and constructed in red brick walling with Staffordshire blue tiles and slate roofs. The development site is visible on late-19th century mapping (Fig.1) and makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



Fig.1 – c.1899-1901 OS map [online] (Staffs HER)

Assessment and Impact

The proposed development would involve the conversion of the community building into residential use, the external works to facilitate this would include blocking up some windows to the front and rear elevation, insertion of new external doors and rendering the whole of the building.

The building currently makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as it represents a good example of traditional construction in handmade orange-reddish bricks with a pitched blue clay tile roof and is illustrative of traditional, such as the dentilled eaves. Although there have been some modern alterations, such as the porch added to the front and replacement faux sash windows, the building has still retained its historic linear plan form, modest and traditional character.

Render

Whilst no specific details have been provided for the colour, finish and application of the proposed render, this would likely have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It is likely that the projection of the render when applied to the building would subsume architectural detailing, such as window reveals and the dentilled brickwork to the eaves, thus diminish its vernacular character and detailing. In addition, the render would cover the charm, character and patina of age currently presented by the traditional brickwork.

It is noted that there are other examples of rendering within the village and within vicinity of the site. However, these numbers are limited. Some of the rendered buildings are modern late-20th century housing which do not contribute to the area's significance, whilst others are modern inappropriate render applications (e.g. roughcast) and their application has detracted from the building's character. These examples of render elsewhere have a harmful impact on the significance of the Conservation Area and, as their number is limited, they do not form part of the *overriding* character of the area.

From a conservation perspective, it would be recommended that the rendering is removed from the proposal to minimise the visual impact on the appearance of the designated heritage asset.

Alterations to windows and doors

It is proposed to infill some windows to the front and rear, the principle of which would likely have a negligible impact on the character of the Conservation Area. However, as set out above, there would be some concerns over the proposed rendering infill of these openings. Subject to the removal of the render from the proposed development, it would be recommended that the windows are infilled with sympathetic colour and finish brickwork.

The application form states that all windows and doors would be replaced with upvc alternatives. From a conservation perspective, upvc windows and doors are often discouraged as they have bulky and shiny frames which cannot authentically replicate the craftsmanship and detailing of historic joinery. Nevertheless, there have been some recent improvements in the design and manufacture of upvc windows and some products are more sympathetic to the historic detailing. It would, therefore, be recommended that further clarification on the proposed detailing of replacement windows and external doors (such as technical drawings and/or manufacturer's specifications) would be provided to illustrate the visual impact of these alterations.

Boundary treatments

Currently there is a modern fence at the rear, running perpendicular to the roadside. The proposed location and block plan (dwg no. 1211-006) mentions the installation of a fence, but no specific details of this have been provided with the submission. Further clarification and details would be required to fully understand the extent of the proposal, or is the existing fence just to remain in situ?

Legislation and Policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The local planning authority should have a desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (s.72).

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

In determining applications, local authorities should take account of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (par.210).

Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within the setting), should require clear and convincing justification (par.213).

Where a proposed development would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use (par.215).

Local Development Framework

Consideration should also be given to the following documents and local development framework policies:

- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020) – DC2 The Historic Environment

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the proposal would have a minor-moderate harmful impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This would be contrary to s.72 of the Act. With reference to planning policies, this would be 'less than substantial harm' to the designated heritage asset (par.215 of NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework). There does not appear to be clear and convincing justification provided for this level of harm (par.213 of NPPF) and there is a lack of detailed information to determine whether the proposed works would be high-quality to minimise some of the visual impact. We, therefore, object to the proposal from a conservation perspective.

We would recommend the following:

- Removal of the rendering of the building from the proposed development
- Further technical information on the window and door detailing
- Further details on any alterations to boundary treatments

Conservation Officer