

Application No: 13/3520M

Location: St Johns Parish Church, CHURCH HILL, KNUTSFORD, CHESHIRE, WA16 6DH

Proposal: Reglazing windows including relocation of existing stained glass into the existing stained frames; protective guards to stained glass as existing

Applicant: Parochial Church Council

Expiry Date: 14-Oct-2013

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION: Refuse

MAIN ISSUES:

- Impact on the character, appearance and setting of the Grade 2 * Listed Building
- Impact on residential amenity

REASON FOR TAKING THE APPLICATION TO COMMITTEE

Councillor Raynes has called the application in to committee on the following grounds:

By relocating the stained glass windows to the upper level of the building, access to them will be severely restricted, especially to those with mobility issues, rendering the detail of workmanship and commemorative inscriptions inaccessible to future generations.

APPLICATION SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site relates to St John's Parish Church, which is a C18th Georgian Grade 2 * Listed Building located within Knutsford Town Centre and the Knutsford Town Centre Conservation Area.

PROPOSALS

The proposals are for the removal and relocation of 4no stained glass windows from the ground floor North and South elevations to the ground and first floor west elevation, and the removal and relocation of a ground floor north elevation stained glass window to the ground floor south elevation.

These windows were installed over time in the Victorian period.

It is also proposed to replace 2no ground floor and 4no first floor south elevation windows, which are currently 'plain glazed' with relatively clear glass. The same is proposed to the north elevation, to 3no ground floor and 4no first floor windows. The same is also proposed to a first floor level east elevation window.

The proposals are required to allow more light into the church and to 'open it up' to the community, offering a better internal and external view. It is also stated in the submission that relocating the stained glass windows to the West elevation would make them and the church more prominent and visually accessible to the community. This would be facilitated through making the relocated windows 'back-lit' internally.

It is noted that the proposed works do not require Listed Building Consent as they are covered by ecclesiastical exemption. Planning permission is required because the alterations materially affect the appearance of the building.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES (external to planning)

English Heritage- do not wish to comment in detail and supply general observations. They have no objection in principle from a heritage point of view, subject to details regarding the technical aspects of the removal/ insertion of the windows. They do, however, note that there may be other considerations that need to be weighed into a decision, such as the community value the windows have in their current position. They conclude that the proposal should be determined in accordance with policy guidance and on the basis of our specialist conservation advice.

Knutsford Conservation and Heritage Group- object on the following grounds;

- The applicant has demonstrated insufficient justification for the proposed works and insufficient consideration of alternative possibilities.

- The stained glass windows proposed for relocation are the work of Heaton Butler and Bayne, one of the principal stained glass makers at the time, the firm's work including the Brunel memorial window in Westminster Abbey. The stained glass windows at St John's Church are in the Renaissance style, depicting Biblical scenes. They are an integral part of the Grade II* listed building.

- The fact that the Church is listed as Grade II* recognises the importance of the windows, demonstrated by their being expressly particularised and described in the national listing text as forming a "series". The series is of nave not gallery windows.

- There are other entirely viable methods to bringing light into the church which would not require the relocation of the windows.

- It is assumed the Church wishes to continue to focus the principal views as those within the Church, including of the Altar, rather than the views outwards from the inside of St John's Church. Views outwards would be very much a subsidiary reason for visiting the Church.

-The proposals do not provide a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Victorian Society- No Objection

Development Management Archaeologist- No Objection

VIEWS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Knutsford Town Council- The Council objects to the application on the grounds that the proposed relocation of the stained glass windows would be to the detriment of the historical integrity of the building. The applicant has failed to provide sufficient reasoning for the Council to go against established practice for buildings of such significant historical importance.

REPRESENTATIONS

Occupier of 9 Malvern Road (On behalf of the Royal British Legion)- recommends approval in relation to part of the proposal, which is to move the 1914-1918 War Memorial stained glass window from its present location to a new location.

28 other local residents have written in expressing support of the proposed development.

A Councillor is also in favour of the proposed development.

The planning related reasons for supporting the application comprise:

-The relocation of the windows would improve the light levels within this dark building and would make the windows more visible from the outside, to the benefit of the community

- Would open up the church to the community- it is noted that many other community groups already use the building for various activities such as Tatton Singers, Civic Services and May Day Celebrations and the works would open it up to more groups.

- No objections have been received from the Georgian Society, Victorian Society, the Diocese, or English Heritage.

RELEVANT HISTORY

12/3273M

Alterations to entrance area, including new ramp, steps and railings. New bin store.

APPROVED

19/10/12

POLICY

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan – saved policies

BE1 (Design principles for new developments)

BE2 (Preservation of the historic environment)

BE16 (Setting of Listed Building)
BE21 (Archeaology)
DC1 (High quality design for new build)
DC2 (Design quality for extensions and alterations)
DC3 (Protection of the amenities of nearby residential properties)
DC6 (Safe and convenient access for vehicles, special needs groups and pedestrians)
DC38 (Guidelines for space, light and privacy for housing development)
H13 (Protecting residential areas)
KTC1, KTC 2, KTC3, KTC 4 (Knutsford Town Centre Conservation Area)

Between them these policies aim to protect the living conditions of adjoining residential properties from harmful loss of amenity such as loss of privacy, overshadowing, loss of light or overbearing impact. They aim to ensure that the design of any extension or new building is sympathetic to the existing Listed Building on the site, Conservation Area, surrounding properties and the wider street scene by virtue of being appropriate in form and scale and utilising sympathetic building materials. They seek to ensure highway safety is maintained.

National Planning Policy Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework reinforces the system of statutory development plans. When considering the weight to be attached to development plan policies, paragraphs 214 and 215 enable 'full weight' to be given to Development Plan policies adopted under the 2004 Act. The Macclesfield Local Plan policies, although saved in accordance with the 2004 Act are not adopted under it. Consequently, following the guidance in paragraph 215, "*due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with this framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the framework, the greater the weight that may be given)*".

The Local Plan policies outlined above are all consistent with the NPPF and should therefore be given full weight.

KEY ISSUES

Impact on the Conservation Area/ Listed Building

The comments from English Heritage have been carefully considered.

However, the Conservation Officer raises a strong objection to the proposals, stating the following;

There is an objection in principle to the assumed dismantling of and relocation of all the stain glass windows proposed with the exception of the war memorial window, for reasons outlined below. It is felt there is insufficient justification for the removal and potential damage to the windows which are an integral part of the building which is designated as Grade II*. The current situation of light within the church is deemed more than sufficient for its use as a religious building and any issues relating to light can be overcome in less harmful ways, allowing the integrity of the windows and church to remain.

It is also considered that the replacement of the other windows to plain glazing would similarly have an adverse impact on the historical and architectural fabric of this Grade 2 * Listed Building.

It is considered that the proposed works will constitute 'Less than Substantial Harm.' Under the NPPF Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states that 'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.'

St John's Church is Grade II*, a grading attached to only 5.5% of the nationally listed building stock. Where there is less than substantial harm this harm has to be weighed against the public benefit.

The stained glass windows signify both a biblical story but also a memorial to local worshippers and their personal story and relationship to the church. The location of the windows at ground floor level allows the windows to be viewed by all; if the windows to be inserted to the upper floors was permitted, this would restrict access for disabled and infirm members of the community, which would not be in the public benefit.

Whilst the 28 letters in support of the works have been carefully considered, the objections received from the Town Council and from the Knutsford Heritage Group also indicate some lack of support from the community. These points further question what the public benefits actually would be.

The Heritage Statement submitted mentions that the theological message for St John's is to be "belonging" to the Town, there are objections from sections of the community which goes against this message.

It is noted that English Heritage do not object from a heritage point of view, but that they note that the impact on the historic fabric of the building has to be weighed against the benefit to the community as a result of the works. Advice from English Heritage states the following:

All grades of harm, including total destruction, minor physical harm and harm through change to the setting, can be justified on the grounds of public benefits that outweigh that harm taking account of the 'great weight' to be given to conservation and provided the justification is clear and convincing (paragraphs 133 and 134). Public benefits in this sense will most likely be the fulfilment of one or more of the objectives of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF, provided the benefits will enure for the wider community and not just for private individuals or corporations. It is very important to consider if conflict between the provision of such public benefits and heritage conservation is necessary.

In conclusion, the public benefit for the wider community is not considered clear nor substantiated by the proposed works and perceived harm to a grade II* listed building.

Paragraph 132 of the NPPF states:

When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.

The justifications put forward within the supporting documents attached to the application are considered to be; the need for additional light in the Church; for those in the Church to view outside, and vice versa, lastly to restore the original Georgian church as originally constructed in 1744 and showcasing the building and windows to a wider public audience.

Assessment of Submitted Justifications

1. Graham Holland provided Officers with photographs of the inside of the church to show the lighting concerns. From these images the building appears to have sufficient light, and together with the proposed and granted faculty works the light exposure and overall feeling of light will be enhanced beyond this seemingly satisfactory baseline position. This photograph does not show a dark and unusable building, therefore displaying no justification for window removal.

2. Church windows are usually relatively high compared to domestic window height, assuming less visibility into and out of the building to allow for the church to become a place to reflect and worship, not to be distracted by the outside world. Whilst it is noted that the applicants want to make the church more accessible, the requirement to see into and out of the building is not considered to be in accordance with its use.

3. Restoring the church back to its 18th century character is considered to be an inappropriate approach to a grade II* listed building. The Victorian additions are a clear historical marker of the church's history, one which now adds to its special architectural and historic interest. Removing (dismantling) historic fabric associated with this and reordering from their original context, will ultimately water down the integrity of the building as the 19th century additions are part of the building's character and architectural and historic interest.

Significance of the Heaton Butler and Bayne Windows

The supporting evidence states the windows are of low/moderate significance, but doesn't state why or how this assessment and judgement has been arrived at. Heaton Butler and Bayne were significant stained glass manufacturers and their work is present in many buildings, most of these are grade II* and grade I. The heritage statement then contradicts this low/moderate significance by stating the windows have a "high impact on the interior". The negative impact around these windows appears to be based upon light levels, which given the photographic evidence is considered to be unsubstantiated.

St John's Church is grade II* and the stained windows are mentioned in the list description. Whilst the windows will remain in the church, and it is noted that their relocation would make them more visible from outside the church, nevertheless their visibility will be reduced for all members of the community and church when inside the church. The window's relocation

could also be damaged in the process of being moved without enough justification, which would compromise the work by Heaton, Butler and Bayne and also the church as a whole.

The stained windows are displayed in a series; this is referenced in the recent Pevsner Architectural Guide 2011. They tell a biblical story but like many windows were personally dedicated to the church by members of the parish, over time, which suggests that these windows are important (or were) to the congregation and therefore belong within the body of the church where they were initially placed, to be preserved in situ for the wider public benefit.

The List Description of the church mentions the windows "north and south aisles form a series in a similar renaissance style depicting old and new testament scenes, dated 1868, 1895, 1919, 1921, Heaton, Butler and Bayne."

Whatever the age of the church, stained glass has played its part in the decoration and enrichment of the architecture. These windows have also continued to tell another story, that of the people who have donated the window or are commemorated in them. By inscriptions and depictions the glass records for posterity the whole story of their installation and purpose. And so they are deemed to have historical, artistic, theological and personal significance. This is also considered to some extent to be true of the other more plain glazing to the ground and first floors, which would be replaced, resulting in a further loss of historical fabric and significance.

War Memorial Window

When the War memorial chapel was relocated, the war memorial window was not relocated alongside. There is logic therefore to the moving of this window so it can be with the memorial chapel. There is no objection to this work being carried out subject to a method statement being conditioned, which would inform the relocation and any new materials or repairs which are needed.

Potential for damage

Historic glass is very delicate and easily subject to damage, the only real justification for dismantling or removal would be for restoration due to extensive damage.

Stained glass is made of many components, each with inherent risks when being restored or in this case removed. The decoration of the glass itself, fixing, fixing system, support frame, and the condition of each material needs to be understood to understand what the risks will be, knowing this condition is important for overall preservation of each window.

This information has not been produced and therefore there is no evidence to state the windows would withstand the removal and level of restoration required.

Benefit to the historic glass should come before any other consideration. The intervention and treatment of the windows should be kept to a minimum; and signs of age are considered to be an integral part of the history of this building. Overall therefore the conservation of the windows should be the priority, and little has been provided in relation to a conservation plan, potential risks removing them, method for reinstatement, and potential for the loss of historic fabric.

For the reasons examined above, the proposed development is considered to adversely impact on the historic fabric and integrity of this Grade 2 * Listed Building. The public benefits of the proposals are not deemed to outweigh this (less than substantial) harm and therefore the development is considered not to accord with local plan policies BE2, BE16, and the NPPF.

Amenity

No amenity issues are raised and the scheme would be DC3 compliant.

CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

To conclude, it is considered that there is insufficient justification for the removal and potential damage to the windows which are an integral part of this Grade 2 * Listed Building. The relocation of these windows would adversely impact on the architectural and historical significance of this Listed Building and its setting, contrary to Macclesfield Borough Local Plan policies BE2, BE16, BE18 and the NPPF. The public benefits that could arise from this proposal is not considered to be outweighed by the aforementioned harm.

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions/informatives/planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Northern Area Manager has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

Should this application be the subject of an appeal, authority shall be delegated to the Northern Area Manager in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee to enter into a planning agreement in accordance with the S106 Town and Country Planning Act to secure the Heads of Terms for a S106 Agreement.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse approval

1. POL01 - Policies
2. Informative
3. Plans
4. Impact on the Grade 2 * Listed Building

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