

HISTORIC BUILDINGS and PLACES

To Rochdale Planning

Consultation response on former All Saints Church, Foxholes Road, Hamer, Rochdale.

Reference 25/01089/LBC

Thankyou for your two consultations (for planning permission and listed building consent) on the proposed conversion of All Saints Church, Hamer.

I am sorry that this response is a few days beyond your 21 day deadline but of course Christmas and New Year have reduced the working days in the intervening period.

It comes, as you request, as an attachment to a covering email.

On the substantive scheme, HBAP is able to welcome the principle of this conversion.

There are still a number of important questions to be answered, which we outline below, but the present application embodies a remarkably sensitive approach, which we can endorse. This, despite the fact that the Heritage Statement makes no reference to two critical sources of information – the Pevsner volume in “The Buildings of England” on “Manchester and South East Lancashire” and the detailed inventory compiled by The Church Buildings Council – two serious deficiencies.

Where other schemes write off the interior of redundant churches by cramming them with flats, this application envisages the creation of a single house. The “interventions” are limited to the aisles and transept – the nave and the chancel remain open to their full height whilst the principal view from west to east, so significant to the drama of the interior and its liturgical significance, appears to be left completely open. It is promised that any new partitions will be reversible and key fittings such as the font and pulpit are to be retained.

But there do remain vital questions which must be answered before we can offer whole-hearted endorsement :

1. We appreciate that the useability of the nave would benefit from the removal of the pews. However we cannot accept wholesale removal and urge the retention of representative examples. Those painted “Free” on the pew ends (indicating that they were available to those who couldn’t afford pew rents) are especially evocative.
2. As we understand it, only one set of choir stalls remain in the chancel. In such a large space it does seem very hard to accept that those that survive cannot be retained, if necessary after resiting. Can this be explored ?
3. Can we just be absolutely certain that the pulpit is to be retained. The implication of Sheet 8 among the drawings showing the ground floor as proposed and the long cross section at Sheet 9 is that it is to remain but we were rather thrown by Plate 20 of The Heritage Statement which illustrates it but then refers to it, incorrectly, as the “lectern”
4. As we read the plans the font is to stay but is to be “sealed”. Does that mean that the font lid (which is by Medland Taylor) is to be secured to the font ? Whilst font lids are designed to prevent misuse of a sacred object like a font and indeed the holy water which it holds, I wonder whether an irreversible seal is essential in a projected private

conversion as proposed here ? Why not retain the font and its lid together but without fixing the latter to the former ?

5. All Saints is significant for its stained glass.

- a) We urge strongly that express promises are sought that the fine East and West Windows, both by the distinguished stained glass artist, William Wailes (whose former house in Gateshead is now in part a museum in celebration of his career) are to be retained in full
- b) The plans indicate that the diocese intends to remove and resite a tripartite stained glass window in the south aisle but can assurances be given that all the other stained glass windows will remain and that the south aisle window effected will be appropriately reglazed.
- c) The plans refer to the introduction of secondary glazing (I presume on the inner face) on all the windows within the aisles.

Can this be explained further as there are no drawings giving details and there is no justification offered.

The Church Buildings Council advises against the use of secondary glazing in front of stained glass as this impedes appreciation through the creation of shadows and glare. Inadequate ventilation between the two skins of glass can also stimulate decay mechanisms in the lead caming.

Each of the new rooms is modest in size and should be technically easy to heat without worrying about heat loss through the historic glass.

How will the new rooms be ventilated ?

- d) One of the plates shows a perspex sheet presently placed over the west window. Is this to stay and if it is, is it clear that it does not impede ventilation of the external surface ?

6. The floorscape has a fine set of tiles, especially in the chancel and we urge that they be retained rather than covered by a new floor, as currently proposed. Even where new heating is to be provided under the historic floor which will therefore have to be raised the better schemes reuse the significant tiling on the upper surface of the new floor.

Photos indicate that some of the tiles have evidence of rising damp and salts. The reason for this must be understood before any work is carried out on the floor.

Much advice on underfloor heating in places of worship is given in the ChurchCare website.

7. The plates in the supporting documentation show large areas of internal walling stripped of plaster. We presume that those areas will be replastered but it is important to understand why they were stripped in the first place. It could be evidence of efforts to allow the walling to dry out after the entry of damp or indeed irrigation after suspected

dryrot. Plate 28 in the Heritage Statement appears to show the presence of two bonding timbers to the left. That should be checked as such timbers can harbour rot.

8. Are we correct that the frame of the organ is to stay ? There is reference to the “organ area” but without a stated use.

Plates 23 and 26 of The Heritage Statement show fine stretches of Gothic timberwork framing the organ to its west and to the south. That facing west appears to be removed to allow a new “en-suite” to abut the space – will it be offered for architectural salvage ?

Are we right to assume that that facing south into the chancel is to be retained ?

I am sorry that there are so many questions but they relate to pivotal matters of detail.

As a courtesy and to assist in ascertaining answers to the questions above a copy of this response and the supporting email goes to Saleem Architects, as the professional agents.

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