



JAMES CAMPBELL ASSOCIATES LTD

CHARTERED ARCHITECTURAL SERVICES



**Campbell House
173 Rochdale Road
Firgrove
Rochdale
OL16 3BN**

Tel: 01706 354888
Mob: 07817 623183
07817 243398
Email: admin@jamescampbellassociates.co.uk
Web: www.jamescampbellassociates.co.uk

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ADDITIONAL HERITAGE INFORMATION - GRADE II LISTED CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

**PROPOSAL - CHANGE OF USE FROM PUBLIC HOUSE AND RESTAURANT TO OFFICE WITH
ASSOCIATED PARKING**

LOCATION - THE CHURCH INN, CASTLE HILL ROAD, BURY, BL9 6UH

Grade II Listed Church of St John the Baptist, Birtle – Significance and Setting

The Church of St John the Baptist, Castle Hill Road, Birtle, located approximately 130 metres to the north-west of the application site, is a Grade II Listed Building (List Entry No. 1390505, first listed 9 May 2003) and is therefore a designated heritage asset of national significance.

The official listing describes the church as dating from 1845, designed by George Shaw of Uppermill, and constructed in rock-faced ashlar with ashlar dressings beneath slate roofs with stone-coped gables, executed in an Early English Gothic style. The building is described as comprising a chancel and nave with north vestry and adjacent small north transept, with key external architectural features including buttresses and diagonal buttresses with set-offs, triple lancet windows with cusped arches to the east elevation, lancet windows to the side elevations, a gabled south porch and a bellcote to the west gable.

The official listing also identifies the particular significance of the building's interior, including the survival of hammer beam roofs to both nave and chancel rising from stone corbels, together with carved angel detailing to the hammer beam ends, arched braces, panelled timber reredos, dado panelling, choir stalls, carved pulpit, historic stone font and surviving nave pews.

Historic England specifically concludes that:

"This small church is a relatively early example of ecclesiologically correct Gothic, the exterior simplicity combined with a richer interior being appropriate for its rural site."

This statement is particularly important in understanding why the building is designated. The church derives significance not only from its architectural composition and survival of historic fabric, but also from its embodiment of the ecclesiological movement of the mid-19th century, during which Anglican church design increasingly sought archaeological correctness, liturgical propriety and architectural authenticity inspired by medieval precedents.

Historically, the church reflects a significant phase in the development of Birtle (historically Bircle), representing the formal establishment of Anglican ecclesiastical infrastructure within what was historically a dispersed agricultural settlement. Prior to its construction, the surrounding area was characterised primarily by scattered farms and isolated buildings rather than a concentrated village centre. The creation of the church therefore marked

an important moment in the social and physical development of the locality, establishing a clear religious and communal focal point for the wider rural population.

The church's significance is further enhanced by its historic relationship with nearby associated buildings, including the former parish school and the Church Inn, which together formed the modest historic nucleus of community life within Birtle. In this context, the Church Inn historically functioned as part of the wider social landscape associated with the church and surrounding rural settlement, albeit serving a distinct social rather than ecclesiastical role.

The significance of the listed church is also informed by its setting. Its rural location, visual prominence, churchyard context and relationship with surrounding open countryside all contribute positively to its character and appreciation as a traditional Victorian parish church serving a dispersed moorland community.

Whilst the application site lies in relative proximity, it remains physically distinct from the listed church, separated by existing development, hardstanding, established boundary treatments and the evolved built form of the former public house complex. Although there is a recognised historic associative relationship between the two assets, the proposed change of use of the former Church Inn to office accommodation, together with associated alterations, would not affect the architectural integrity, visual prominence, historic appreciation or wider rural setting of the listed church.

The proposal would therefore preserve both the significance and setting of the Grade II listed Church of St John the Baptist, resulting in no harm to the designated heritage asset.