

Heatons and Reddish Area Committee

17th June 2024

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services)

<u>ITEM 1</u>	DC/091386
<u>SITE ADDRESS</u>	St Martins Church, 112 Crescent Park, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, SK4 2JE
<u>PROPOSAL</u>	Remodelling and extension of existing church building with associated parking and external works.

INFORMATION

This application needs to be considered against the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. Under Article 6, the applicants [and those third parties, including local residents, who have made representations] have the right to a fair hearing and to this end the Committee must give full consideration to their comments.

Article 8 and Protocol 1 Article 1 confer(s) a right of respect for a person's home, other land and business assets. In taking account of all material considerations, including Council policy as set out in the Unitary Development Plan, the Head of Development and Control has concluded that some rights conferred by these Articles on the applicant(s)/objectors/residents and other occupiers and owners of nearby land that might be affected may be interfered with but that that interference is in accordance with the law and justified by being in the public interest and on the basis of the planning merits of the development proposal. He believes that any restriction on these rights posed by approval of the application is proportionate to the wider benefits of approval and that such a decision falls within the margin of discretion afforded to the Council under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

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ITEM 1

Application Reference	DC/091386
Location:	St Martins Church 112 Crescent Park Heaton Norris Stockport SK4 2JE
PROPOSAL:	Remodelling and extension of existing church building with associated parking and external works.
Type Of Application:	Full Application
Registration Date:	06.03.2024
Expiry Date:	Extension of time agreed
Case Officer:	Jeni Regan
Applicant:	St. Martins C. Of E. Church
Agent:	Bate and Taylor Architects

DELEGATION/COMMITTEE STATUS

Heatons and Reddish Area Committee.

The application has been referred to Committee as a result of 8 letters of objection.

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Planning permission is sought under this application for the proposed remodelling and extension of the existing church building. More specifically, the following works are proposed:

1) Refurbishment and extension of the front entrance

The proposals include the erection of a single storey extension to the front elevation of the existing church building to provide a new main entrance. This would include steps up to the main entrance from the front and a new access ramp to the side to provide level access. This would replace the existing small front entrance outrigger that has a side door into a small lobby via 3 steps.

The extension would have a contemporary design with a combination of flat and sloping roof elements, large areas of glazing and signage. Internally, this would provide a large lobby area before entering the main worship space. 3 no. ambulant accessible toilets and 1 fully accessible toilet containing baby change facilities would also be provided within the extension. Finally, a new kitchen area would be created with a serving area into the new lobby.

The new front entrance extension would extend approx. 4.8m forwards from the existing main wall of the front elevation of the church and would be approx. 16.2m wide across the whole of the existing front elevation. The height of the flat roof element of the entrance extension would measure approx. 4.8m in height, with the eaves of the sloping roof measuring 4.1m and the highest point of the sloping roof measuring approx. 6.9m.

2) Reconfiguration and extension of side area

The proposals also include the erection of a single storey extension to the side elevation of the existing church building with a pitched roof design. This extension would provide space for an office, kitchen, two children's ministry rooms and a creche. The extension would measure 27.2m in length along the side of the existing church and would extend approx. 6m out from the existing side elevation wall. The pitch roof design allows the retention and protection of the existing stained glass windows in the side elevation of the existing church. The height of the eaves is approximately 4m up to approx. 6.1m high to the ridge of the side element of the extension and 6.6m high to the ridge of the front element of the extension.

The extension includes a set of steps on the front elevation up to a secondary lobby area, that would serve the back of the kitchen and into the proposed office. The rear elevation of the extension includes a patio door from one of the children's ministry rooms, to provide access to a new enclosed outside grassed space.

3) Car park and other external works

In addition to the proposed works to the main church building, there are also further works externally around the application site that require permission. This includes the demolition of the existing prefabricated church hall located to the rear of the site, improvements to the site access and parking area by rationalising and upgrading the existing surface, and the installation of additional / new fencing and gates to improve the security of the site.

It is proposed to resurface the existing parking area to the front and side of the building with grasscrete for the parking spaces, a permeable road surface material for the vehicular route through the site and paving for the pedestrian route areas. The reconfiguration of the site would provide a vehicular access only from Crescent Park and egress only from Didsbury Road, with a new pedestrian access being created from the Didsbury Road frontage. The existing second vehicle access point onto Didsbury Road would be closed and new hedgerow planted. A detailed soft landscaping plan has been submitted to accompany the application showing the new landscaping for around the site.

The application also provides information about other internal reconfiguration and redecoration works, however as the existing church building is not a designated Listed building, these works do not require planning permission and as such, do not form part of this application.

As outlined within the planning submission, the proposals seek to address a number of current key issues experienced by the church and its congregation/community users;

- Improving the layout of the worship space to meet the requirements of current congregation numbers by reconfiguring the internal layout and utilising unused spaces.
- Relocation of activities currently situated within the main worship space, including kitchen, food bank and storage areas.
- Creating a new 'fit for purpose' kitchen, food bank office and creche space.
- Expanding the existing Children's Ministry provision with dedicated, secure external access and play space.

- Providing barrier free access throughout the building, including access into the building from outside and access up to the Chancel area.
- Improving the existing WC provision, including fully accessible toilets and baby change facilities.
- Addressing issues with the existing heating, lighting and audio visual provision.
- Improvements to site access and parking.
- Providing a welcoming, barrier free accessible entrance from Didsbury Road which places St. Martin's at the centre of the local community.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The application site is St Martin's C of E Church, located on the corner of Didsbury Road and Crescent Park in Heaton Norris. The front of the church is currently onto Crescent Park and has both vehicular and pedestrian access into the site from Crescent Park. There are 2 further existing vehicular access points onto Didsbury Road, which open onto the existing grassed parking area to the front of the church. The church is set in landscaped grounds and is mostly bounded by hedging and timber fencing. To the rear of the building is a single storey pre-fabricated church hall, and the Church Rectory at 110 Crescent Park.

Both the main church building and the rectory are non-designated heritage assets as Locally Listed Buildings. The site is not located in a Conservation Area and there are no other Listed or Locally Listed Buildings close by.

The application site is located within a Predominantly Residential Area as allocated within the UDP. It is bounded to the north, east and west by existing residential properties along with Crescent Park and the bowling greens to the east. To the south is Didsbury Road and opposite is the Co-op Supermarket with residential apartments above.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 ("PCPA 2004") requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan includes-

- Policies set out in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review adopted 31st May 2006 which have been saved by direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; &
- Policies set out in the Stockport Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document adopted 17th March 2011.

Saved policies of the SUDP Review

<https://www.stockport.gov.uk/topic/current-planning-policies>

- CTF1.1 'Development of Community Services and Facilities'
- CDH1.2 'Non Residential Development in Predominantly Residential Areas'
- CDH1.9 'Community Facilities In Predominantly Residential Areas'

LDF Core Strategy/Development Management policies

<https://www.stockport.gov.uk/topic/current-planning-policies>

- SIE-1 'Quality Places';
- SIE-3 'Protecting Safeguarding and Enhancing the Environment'
- T-1 'Transport and Development'
- T-2 'Parking in Developments'
- T-3 'Safety and Capacity on the Highway Network'

National Planning Policy Framework

A Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on the 19th December 2023 replaced the previous NPPF (originally issued 2012 & revised July 2018, February 2019, July 2021 and September 2023). The NPPF has not altered the fundamental legal requirement under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations (such as the NPPF) indicate otherwise.

The NPPF representing the governments up-to-date planning policy which should be taken into account in dealing with applications focuses on achieving a lasting housing reform, facilitating the delivery of a greater number of homes, ensuring that we get planning for the right homes built in the right places of the right quality at the same time as protecting our environment. If decision takers choose not to follow the NPPF, then clear and convincing reasons for doing so are needed.

N.B. In respect of decision-taking the revised NPPF constitutes a "material consideration".

The relevant paragraphs in this case are as follows:

Introduction - Paras 1, 2

Chapter 2: Achieving Sustainable Development – Paras 7, 8, 11

Chapter 4: Decision-Making – Paras 38, 47

Chapter 12: Achieving Well-Designed and Beautiful Places – Paras 131, 135, 136, 137, 139

Chapter 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment – Paras 200 – 209, 214

Para.225 "existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to the publication of this Framework. Due weight should be given to them, 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)".

Planning Practice Guidance

The Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) is a web-based resource which brings together planning guidance on various topics into one place (launched in March 2014) and coincided with the cancelling of the majority of Government Circulars which had previously given guidance on many aspects of planning.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Reference: J/54412, Type: XHS, Address: St. Martin's Church Didsbury Road Heaton Norris, Decision: GTD, Decision Date: 06-JAN-92, Proposal: Access ramp for the disabled.

NEIGHBOUR'S VIEWS

The owners/occupiers of 26 surrounding properties were notified in writing of the application. In response to the original neighbour notification exercise, letters of objections were received from 8 addresses in response to the application.

Members should also note that a re-notification / reconsultation exercise was completed following the submission of amended plans and information on the 21st May 2024. Following this, further objections have been received from 7 addresses. These were further comments from residents that had previously made representations on the application.

The comments received are summarised below:

Objections to Original Submission

- While I fully support investing in and enhancing the local community, the level of disruption this could cause has not been fully considered.
- What is meant by external play space? What will be the increased noise impact on residents? What will the operating hours be? Many residents work from home, those close enough, myself included will be negatively impacted by this. There is already a community play park on Crescent Park, it makes no sense to build another so close, affecting adjoining and surrounding properties.
- The focus should be on having enough parking spaces to facilitate patrons rather than the 'aesthetic qualities of the grass covered open space visible from Didsbury Road.' There are no plans to increase parking spaces. Your plan is to identify St Martin's C. of E. Church as a focal point within the local community, opening it up to more people, yet there is no plan to increase parking to accommodate these potential new patrons.
- The proposed plans do not give enough clarity on how residents will be affected on the following - (i) noise, smell and nuisance; (ii) traffic generation and safety and accessibility by sustainable transport modes; (iii) parking; (iv) hours of operation; (v) proximity to dwellings; (vi) the scale of the proposal; and (vii) whether or not the character of the area will be changed. Most large-scale, non-residential development will be inappropriate in Predominantly Residential Areas.
- The current plans seem to increase an already problematic issue with parking, traffic and noise
- Describing opening hours as 'unknown' raises concerns
- I would expect some reassurance that there would not be a significant increase in traffic, activity or noise, particularly in the evenings and over the weekends as a result of the improvements and changes.
- The proposed plans only show 26 parking spaces. With the proposed expansion/ events of the church this would not be enough parking.
- The cars would then overspill onto the surrounding streets which are already full from the houses on the main road as well as the residents on the road its self. This is already a major problem that would be made worse by the expansion.

- The current evening events in the existing outbuilding are not detailed. Is there an intention to continue/increase use of church spaces in this way during the evenings?
- There is already some significant noise on the evenings when dance classes are occurring in the outbuilding at the rear which already exceeds the suggested 9pm closure on some evenings. If capacity and facilities were expanded, I would be concerned that noise levels would increase and events become more frequent.
- Privacy concerns in relation to the new ramp, steps and entrances.
- The plans are not in keeping with the current building's architecture/ heritage.
- I think it would be a shame to lose the beautiful architecture of this locally listed building for a cheap looking extension that does not fit the area.
- On the plans the windows are shown facing directly onto our private property.
- With these situated at height I still feel it is invasive and makes me feel very uncomfortable.
- There has been a lot of anti-social behaviour around the church especially at night. There is no mention of any security measures or who is going to have access to the building, what times it will be accessed and for what use.
- Has the impact on residents been considered while work is ongoing - will the road be closed, where will contractors park, will there be noise and dirt for extended periods of time?
- Object to the removal of the hedge along the site boundary – provides privacy, security, noise control from the road and wildlife habitats.
- There is no mention of how maintenance would be carried out to the side building as there is only a narrow gap between the extension and the site boundary.
- Is the excavation process/ groundworks going to cause any effects to adjacent properties / land?
- What is the use of the foodbank? How often/ what times is this going to be used? Who has access? How is this going to be managed.
- Lead on the existing building - Will this be disturbed? Control of lead exposure.
- If the proposed development includes adequate parking for patrons of the Church within the church grounds and double yellow lines from the junction of Crescent Park with Didsbury Road down to the entrance of the Church, then I would be in support of this proposal.
- The top part of Crescent Park suffers greatly from increased parking on the road when there are events on at the Church. Once one side of the road is full, people begin to park on the opposite side of the road (which it is not wide enough for) and partially mount the pavement, restricting access to the pavement for people with prams, people in wheelchairs and mobility scooters and dog walkers.
- This also created significantly decreased access to the driveways, reducing visibility and manoeuvrability. It is not safe.
- This parking also has an effect on the drainage of Crescent Park. We have a lot of deciduous trees at the top end of the road and a constant stream of parked cars here prevents the road sweepers from being able to keep the roads edge free from leaves which then begin to rot and turn into a slippery mess blocking drains and causing flooding to happen at the end of the road.
- The proposed windows are shown as being clear glass which violates building rules for proposed windows overlooking neighbouring properties. The windows would take away our privacy, they would be 'overlooking', this violates building rules.

- The windows would be right at the end of our gardens and would look down the length of our private gardens and into our lounges, kitchens and bedrooms. We sit and relax in our gardens and relax gardening. The fact that they are proposed to be high up, just underneath the height of the current double stained glass windows, does not prevent any present or future internal platforms being constructed in the proposed extension rooms eg to access shelving with step-ladders.
- We request that the windows be installed on the ends of the proposed building above the doors, together with installing internal windows on the proposed dividing internal walls between each of the proposed rooms in this extension; the original church building has its internal space lighting supplemented by electric lighting - this could also be undertaken in this proposed extension.
- If the above solution is rejected, these windows are required, by building rules, to be opaque
- We request that stained glass is used instead of clear glass, to provide the opaque protection for us. This would be in keeping with the existing windows and this will also respect this culturally important building (locally listed), as will stone window frames.
- If the above solution is rejected, we request coloured opaque glass which would match the glass in the existing church windows, ie green coloured - with stone window frames or a stone inlaid the length of each of the 4 sides of the windows to give the impression of stone window frames - the colour of these stones should match the colour of the existing window frames.
- A contemporary design does not match this pre-First World War church.
- That these windows are in keeping with the current historical and locally listed building is also very valuable for the community including the church community and adjacent neighbours for educational reasons and reasons of well-being and spirituality. The latter is gained also from seeing the distinct outside of a church building, as we residents have done for most of our life. Children need the powerful experience of seeing these buildings in their lived day-to-day life, not just reading about them/seeing them in abstract form in books and film, a distant two-dimensional form.
- The hedges are on our land (see our land deeds; we have measured are land length according to specifications mentioned therein). They are our property and we do not wish for them to be removed.
- Relevant and full tree and hedge protection should be used for construction.
- Will sound proof fencing be used to minimise disruption to residents.
- Interference with our hawthorn hedges would compromise our security in an area where there are long-standing issues of burglary and anti-social behaviour. A dense and prickly high and wide hedge is nigh on impossible to climb over or push through - it does not support the weight of an adult/youth intruder, any would-be intruders would sink into the very prickly hedge - a fence/wall cannot provide this deterrent. A hedge does not blow over in the wind. The hedge at is cultivated to be as dense as possible, the family and all the owners of this property have maintained this hedge security successfully for over 65 years. Those residents who have put a fence in front of their hedge, have done so for reasons of extra security.
- These are very mature trees and hedgerows, they would take several/up to 10 years to re-grow if they are damaged and be expensive to replace.
- Severed roots, if left in the soil, rot causing fungus to grow on them, this has a high risk of spreading to living roots killing the hedge/tree - beloved pets buried in their proximity would have to be exhumed for replanting works for hedge/tree.
- The hedges/trees are very sentimental garden features

- The hedges and trees provide a source to neutralise poisonous carbon dioxide emissions from the heavy traffic flow on the adjacent main road, into beneficial oxygen.
- The hedges and trees provide a source of outside shade from the increasing high temperature periods in the summer months.
- They also provide assistance with excessive rain water ie flood prevention by way of drinking up the water.
- At least 2 hedgehogs visit our gardens, they use the hedge for shelter, insect food source, and if a suitable spot can be found, for hibernating and breeding. A hole needs to be left in any gating/fences/walls to allow them access to habitat.
- Commuting bats (from the locality) use the hedges as highways including for eating the insects gathered above them.
- Request for the latin names of the hedgerow plan.
- What is the use and capacity of the new building?
- Can all the resulting cars be managed to avoid overflow onto Crescent Park?
- The neighbours most affected by this are very concerned about the condition of the tree stump, if it is removed. The ground under their fence would be hollower and weaken their fence; the fence has a small wooden structure attached to it. Their concern applies equally to their hedge.
- Polite request to paint these new recent white additions, which include a lengthy and wide vertical white tunnel, with black paint so they match similar structures and do not stand out looking unsightly.
- Please confirm that new drain pipes, guttering etc will be painted black.
- Fundamental issues associated with the proposal and seeks to support and steer the LPA toward the only reasonable conclusion; refusal.
- The application is not supported by national or local planning policy. It would render permanent harm to the living conditions of the occupants of nearby residential properties in terms of outlook, privacy and noise and disturbance. Moreover, there is potential for harm to a locally listed, non-designated heritage asset, as a consequence of the inappropriate materials palette, size and positioning of extensions.
- Overall, it is asserted that the proposal would not represent sustainable development for which the National Planning Policy Framework (‘the Framework’) advocates a presumption in favour. It is therefore respectfully requested that permission be refused.
- The proposal would significantly harm the living conditions of the occupants of adjacent properties, with particular regard to outlook, privacy and noise and disturbance.
- No amount of new landscaping, which would take time to mature in any event, would mitigate this harmful impact. Furthermore, such planting could only be controlled for a period of 5 years, would be difficult to maintain and would likely provide limited screening (particularly in winter months). Lastly, although extensions would be seen against the silhouette of the larger church, would match floor levels and would be single-storey, this would not alleviate the harm identified by virtue of their overall scale, bulk and mass. These are simply not reasons to extend the church in the manner proposed.
- The proposal is clearly designed to increase the appeal of the church for residents in this area. The enhanced facilities, together with the increased convenience of substantial on-site parking provision, would have this effect. As such, it is highly likely that the congregation, as well as movements to and from the site, would significantly increase.
- The Council has insufficient information to make a reasonable assessment of effects in terms of noise and disturbance. However, it is highly likely that there

would be harm in this regard for reasons given. Such harm would be exacerbated by light disturbance from car headlights, together with any lighting columns that would be necessary for parking security and safety at the site. Again, lighting impacts are unknown.

Further Objections following Amended Plans / Additional Information

- There has been a creche added to the plan, which wasn't in the original application. Who does this creche stand to benefit? Church patrons only or community/general public? What are the operating days/hours? How could this affect increased traffic/noise levels? No information has been given.
- There is no safe traffic flow and it looks poorly considered/ designed
- It makes far more sense to enter the site from Didsbury Road and exit on Crescent Park East, avoiding entrance queues stretching up Crescent park further more. There is also the issue of patrons of the existing park trying to cross the road safely with pets and children while cars potentially block the road.
- The proposed play area is a waste of the space available, there is a gated, huge play park area on the same road and it doesn't make any sense to create another one. The noise disturbance will have a direct negative impact on residents and will no doubt be a cause of stress. The plans for the North elevation severely impact properties, not just in the considered proximity, but far beyond. There doesn't appear to be any consideration for residents whose peace and privacy are now compromised.
- Appreciate the updated details on planned use of the proposed play area but it seems wholly unnecessary to have an additional play area directly next to residents properties particularly given there is a large park and play area in place directly opposite on Crescent Park. This will undoubtedly be a source of noise to neighbours. Something like a community veg garden would much better serve the whole community and be a less likely source of disturbance to residents.
- Entrance/exit to children's ministry on the north elevation and proposed play area still placed directly next to residential areas. While it says that the entrance is only intended for occasional use that seems unlikely seeing as it sits directly between the children's ministry and play area and is the only direct access from inside the building to the play area.
- No additional hedging has been considered at North elevation to provide more privacy for residents and some noise cancellation from the play area.
- The glazing to doors at the North Elevation/ rear of children's ministry should be obscured as these are elevated from floor level and look directly over residential properties gardens, compromising privacy significantly.
- I do not want any windows facing on to my property. This is a loss of privacy and makes me very anxious. These windows are also very close proximity to my garden.
- The Application Response Letter says, "It is not anticipated there would be any additional noise or residential amenity impact beyond the existing, established ancillary use of the church's external areas." This is simply untrue. There is currently no established use of external areas to congregate other than the car park at the front of the church. There is currently no external area next to our garden, only the path between the hut and main church building, which is used merely to walk between buildings. The proposed play area would undoubtedly increase noise significantly.
- The established use of the church does not include outdoor space next to our family home. We have noticed a recent increase in noise from the hut/hall, such as dancing and music on weeknights and weekends. If these kinds of

activities were to continue in the new external area, the noise increase is inevitable. If activities take place within the Children's Ministry room with the double doors left open (e.g. on hot days), it will boom out the noise directly towards our garden.

- Object to the two overlooking windows which are proposed to be unobscured glass.
- It is logical, reasonable and non-discriminatory that these 4 windows also have obscured glazing as the other 7 proposed windows in the row will have to maintain all the neighbours' privacy and mental well-being from being worried and uncomfortable if there is no privacy.
- The diagram relevant to these proposed windows, in the Applicant Response to Case Officer, dated 21st May 2024, shows that it is a mere head's length from the bottom of the window to an adult standing on the floor beneath it; there is a strong possibility that children with enquiring minds will use chairs to stand on or other even more unstable objects to stand on to look out of the window and suffer a fall; this is a Health and Safety issue.
- We say with respect to our neighbour, the church, as we are sure no deliberate privacy breaches are intended, but there are no written guarantees that future higher platforms, shelving needing accessing by ladders etc are not going to be installed.
- There are many additional solutions that could be used to increase the daylight into the proposed clear glass window rooms.
- We are pleased to learn that there are now no plans to uproot any of these hedgerows and trees.
- We note that any of the hedgerows/trees die within 5 years due to accidental works building damage, the planning applicant will replace them like for like as far as possible ie with mature trees.

CONSULTEE RESPONSES

All consultation responses can be viewed in full on the online application file via the Council's public website. However, for the purposes of this report, these are summarised below:

Highways

The proposed development includes parking for 26 vehicles including space for 2 mobility impaired users. The Transport Note submitted with the application outlines the anticipated vehicular traffic resulting from the development and its accessibility by means other than by private car. Regular bus services connect the site to the wider Stockport area and beyond. The formalisation of the car park will enable year-round parking within the site lessening potential demand on adjacent streets. It is not judged that the development will result in any severe impact on the operation of the local highway such as to justify and recommendation for refusal on highway grounds.

No objections to the proposals subject to conditions relating to the submission of a construction method statement, highway conditions surveys of Didsbury Road and Crescent Park, details of vehicle access points, car parking areas, EV charging facilities and cycle parking.

Conservation

St Martin's Church is recognised as a locally listed building of architectural and historic interest. It is acknowledged that a heritage appraisal has been prepared in support of the current planning application. However, further information is requested

in relation to alternative options in the development of the current proposal and that the internal layout is reviewed, reducing the size of the kitchen or considering its re-location, or reducing the overall size and footprint of proposed new accommodation within the western extension to enable a suitable set back to be achieved. Further details about surface materials is also requested.

Great care will be required in the selection of external materials and matters of architectural detailing with a sufficient level of reassurance that these matters have been developed to a level of detail that will deliver an appropriate level of quality of external design.

A lychgate installed on the Didsbury Road frontage is indicated on the street scene elevation and ground floor plans but there is no reference to this within the design and access statement or heritage assessment and detailed plans are absent. Whilst there is no objection to the principle of a introducing a lychgate, this element requires to care and attention to its design with plans prepared to an appropriate level of detail.

Following the submission of amended plans and additional information, further comments were received from the Conservation Officer. Question the requirement for a cooking island. There are alternative ways of designing a functional kitchen that do not require an island. The more the extension projects forward to accommodate the western half of the kitchen, far greater attention is required in relation to the quality of materials and detailed design to provide a clear distinction in appearance from the new entrance, avoiding what may become a simply subservient version or 'shadow' eg a traditional masonry brick gable with articulated dressings.

Opportunities to allow the new spaces to be used more flexibly to provide more kitchen capacity eg aim for more multiple use; adjustment to the proposed room sizes (particularly in respect of the office/crèche/meeting room); and possibly the installation of a folding screen rather than a solid wall between the Children's Ministry I and Children's Ministry II.

Arboriculture

Conservation Area Designations

The proposed development is not within or affected by a conservation Area.

Legally Protected Trees

There are no legally protected trees within this site or affected by this development.

In principle the main works and design will have the potential for a negative impact on the trees on neighbouring properties on all the boundaries. In its current format, it could be considered favourable with some increased details/consideration given to the existing trees in or around the site when designing the construction details, new access/boundary treatment and site layout and implementation of the revised landscaping design to improve the amenity and aesthetics of the site for users and local community for screening of any new development from any highway and making sure a percentage of these are native large species, as well as increased native hedges throughout the scheme and fruit trees at every opportunity.

Nature Development

The site has no nature conservation designations, legal or otherwise as listed in Stockport's current Local Plan (e.g. Site of Biological Importance, Local Nature

Reserve, Green Chain). It has however been identified as an opportunity area within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) pilot study for Greater Manchester. This is not necessarily a barrier to development and does not confer protection or prevention of land uses but shows that such areas have been prioritised for restoring and linking up habitats. This also means that the site would score as 'high strategic significance' within any biodiversity metric calculations.

Habitats on site have been mapped as part of an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey carried out in June 2023 (Rachel Hacking Ecology Ltd Ecological Appraisal, 2023). A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment has been carried out with findings reported in the submitted Biodiversity Impact Assessment Report (Rachel Hacking Ecology Ltd, 2023). Phase 1 Habitats have been transposed into UKHAB and the DEFRA Metric V4.0 has been used to assess baseline conditions and inform the BNG assessment. The metric was submitted to the LPA on 8 April 2024. It is considered that the proposals would result in an overall measurable BNG for both Habitat and Hedgerow Biodiversity Units.

There is considered to be sufficient ecological information available to inform determination of the current application. No objections subject to conditions and informatives relating to bat protection, nesting birds, precautionary measures, invasive species, tree protection, biodiversity enhancement, landscape management sensitive lighting and ecology resurvey after 2 years.

ANALYSIS

Principle of Development

Saved UDP policy CTF1.1 'Development of Community Services and Facilities' states that proposals for the provision of additional community services and facilities will be permitted provided that: they are well located to serve the relevant population by sustainable transport modes; satisfactory access, parking, design and landscaping standards would be achieved; and there would be no harm to the living conditions of neighbouring residents.

Saved UDP policy CDH1.2 'Non Residential Development in Predominantly Residential Areas' outlines that non residential development will be permitted in Predominantly Residential Areas where it can be accommodated without detriment to the residential amenity of adjacent dwellings or the residential area as a whole. In particular account will be taken of: (i) noise, smell and nuisance; (ii) traffic generation and safety and accessibility by sustainable transport modes; (iii) parking; (iv) hours of operation; (v) proximity to dwellings; (vi) the scale of the proposal; and (vii) whether or not the character of the area will be changed. Most large-scale, non-residential development will be inappropriate in Predominantly Residential Areas.

Saved UDP policy CDH1.9 'Community Facilities in Predominantly Residential Areas' goes on to state that subject to the overall requirements of Policy CDH1.1, small-scale community facilities in Predominantly Residential Areas will be permitted provided that: (i) there is no over-riding detrimental effect on the residential amenity of the area by reason of noise, disturbance, visual intrusion or traffic generation; (ii) there is adequate parking provision in accordance with Policy TD1.4; (iii) the proposal does not prejudice highway safety and is accessible by sustainable transport modes; (iv) proposals for new buildings or extensions to existing buildings are in keeping with the character of the area in terms of design and materials used.

Core Strategy policy SIE-1 'Quality Places' outlines that development that is designed and landscaped to the highest contemporary standard, paying high regard to the built and/or natural environment within which it is sited, will be given positive consideration. Specific account should be had of the following; use of materials appropriate to the location; the site's characteristics including landform, landscape, views or vistas (including to/from the Peak District National Park), landmark or gateway features, biodiversity and micro-climate as well as the site's context in relation to surrounding buildings and spaces (particularly with regard to the height, density and massing of buildings); ensuring the safety and security of users whilst not causing harm to the wider environment, the character of the building or accessibility; provision, maintenance and enhancement (where suitable) of satisfactory levels of access, privacy and amenity for future, existing and neighbouring users and residents; and the potential for a mixture of compatible uses to attract people to live, work and play in the same area, facilitating and encouraging sustainable, balanced communities.

This application relates to the refurbishment and extension of the existing church building, the demolition of the existing pre-fab building to the rear, and the reconfiguration of the external areas to provide safe access and egress and properly surfaced and usable car parking for 26 cars.

The application relates to an existing church, St Martin's, located on Didsbury Road. The submission outlines that this is a local neighbourhood church with a sustainable congregation of around 140 people. Therefore, this is an established community use at the site within a Predominantly Residential Area. On this basis, the proposals to retain, refurbish and extend this existing building with an existing operating community use would be acceptable in principle, to protect its future use for this purpose.

Members should note that this is an existing active church that is currently serving its large congregation and the surrounding community. According to the submission, the church is active most days of the week with a number of services, classes and community groups using the space. The use of the existing building is not under consideration through this planning application, as this is an existing lawful use, and there are no proposals for any material change to be made to this use. This application is only to consider the physical works being proposed, as outlined in the Description of Development section earlier in this report. The applicant has confirmed in the submission that the proposed refurbishment and extension works are to provide better accommodation and parking facilities for the existing congregation and community groups that currently use the building, not to increase the use of the site.

Due to the historic nature of the building and site, there are no restrictions from a planning perspective, for example in relation to controls of hours of use, the numbers of people permitted on site, the type of classes/groups etc. Therefore, the queries raised in relation to the proposed hours of operation for the site are not material in this case, as the use of the site is not being considered and can continue as currently being operated.

Notwithstanding this, it is the visual impacts of the proposals, any potential highway safety and parking impacts, the loss of some of the soft landscaping, and the potential impacts of the proposed extensions on the amenity of the surrounding properties that requires consideration. The existing building of St Martin's Church (not including the pre-fab building to the rear) is a Locally Listed

Building. Therefore, the potential impacts of the proposals on this heritage asset must also be assessed.

All of these matters will now be covered in detail below.

Impact on Heritage Asset

As outlined above, St Martin's Church is a locally listed building of architectural and historic interest. On this basis, the application is accompanied by both a Design and Access Statement and a Heritage Statement. The Council's Conservation Officer has assessed the proposals and provided consultation comments in relation to the potential impacts of the proposed works on this non designated heritage asset.

Multiple discussions took place with the applicants in order to address the early concerns raised by the Conservation officer, mainly in relation to the design, size and positioning of the proposed front and side extensions. In the main, the Conservation officer is supportive of the proposals subject to further discussions around materiality and the submission of physical samples for all of the new materials of external construction. This can be completed through the discharge of condition process.

However, the Conservation officer remains of the view that the side element of the extension should be pushed back further to create a greater set back and to provide a more subservient appearance to this element of the built form. In response to this, the applicant has looked at the possibility of reducing the size of the kitchen in order to create a greater recess to the western portion of the extension, to demonstrate its subservience to the main church building. However, to provide such a step back would significantly reduce the usable area of the kitchen, removing the central island and limiting the functionality of the kitchen. It is outlined in the applicant's statement that several alternative configurations have been explored, including providing more flexible spaces to other rooms to allow for greater kitchen capacity. Flexible partitions have been considered, but do not provide the necessary acoustic performance for separate children's activities. Whilst relocation of the kitchen would undermine the purpose for it to be used in isolation with the Narthex as a servery for smaller groups without opening the whole church building and incurring significant additional operational cost. On this basis, it is considered that the applicants have made a considerable effort to look at alternatives, but that to change the layout in the way requested would render the scheme less beneficial in terms of how the space would function for the church, reducing the benefit of implementing the scheme to improve the church facilities.

Notwithstanding the above and in a further attempt to try and resolve the concerns raised by the Conservation Officer, the architect has made further efforts to ensure the western extension is more subservient in appearance than the main building and proposed front extension. As outlined in the submission, the proposed main front entrance to the church, leading to the Narthex, is designed in a bold geometric form, reflecting the strong aspect of the end gable of the existing church. It has been made visually prominent through the use of clearly visible materials, including Trespa/Zinc, and the use of a 'rich' red brick framing the new glazed entrance and projecting canopy. As outlined above, any materials of external construction would be subject to approval via an appropriately worded condition.

However, in contrast to this, the side elevation has now been designed to be more subservient in both form and materiality. The plans now show a minor recess (235mm) from the main front entrance façade and the two elements are separated by a recessed panel. It is confirmed that the detailing would be simpler in design and less articulated than the main entrance. The coloured elevations submitted within the Design and Access Statement now show external materials that would contrast with the main entrance, with the roofing material in slate and the external walls constructed in a lighter buff brick. Again, materials of external construction would be subject to approval via an appropriately worded condition.

It is now considered and agreed that the choice of materials would provide a sympathetic, modern and subservient extension to the original building. As noted in the submitted Heritage Statement: *“When assessed in line with the heritage impact assessment criteria, the proposed work and extension will constitute a minor magnitude of change. The minor change to a heritage asset of low significance is assessed to result in a slight impact and is considered beneficial to the low quality existing south elevation, and a neutral impact overall. The proposed works are minor in nature, the proposed works are assessed as having a slight impact. Overall, it is assessed that the proposed works and extension will have a neutral impact on the significance of the locally listed Church.”* It is considered that this is an appropriate assessment of the proposals and that the conclusions of the Heritage Statement are agreed.

In terms of the planning balance, the public benefits of the proposed development are outlined in the submission in that the works would improve facilities for the ongoing community activities which currently operate at the church including a Food Bank, Toddler Group, Christians Against Poverty Courses, after-school clubs, mid-week community groups and Sunday services. The proposed development will also serve to support the optimum viable use of the locally listed heritage asset as a thriving and active community church and would protect this use and the building moving forward. The proposals include significant investment into a building in much need of renovation, which again delivers significant public and historic benefits. Therefore, on this basis, it is agreed that the public benefits of the scheme would outweigh any harm to the heritage asset, and would secure its optimum viable use. The proposal would be in accordance with Core Strategy policies SIE-3 and Section 16 of the NPPF.

Design and Impact on Visual Amenity

Policy SIE-1 ‘Quality Places’ states that development that is designed and landscaped to the highest contemporary standard, paying high regard to the built and/or natural environment within which it is sited, will be given positive consideration. Specific account should be had to the materials, site’s characteristics, safety and security of users, provision and maintenance of access, privacy and amenity and landscaping.

In addition to the consideration of the proposals in relation to the non-designated heritage asset discussed above, the design and visual impacts of the proposals on the wider area must also be considered. The application site is bounded by buildings of various styles and ages. Therefore, in terms of design approach, the proposals include both traditional and contemporary architecture to be in keeping with the surroundings. It is proposed that brickwork be the predominant material for the extensions to be in keeping with the heritage of the site and will harmonise with the surrounding architecture. However, more contemporary design solutions and materials are proposed to make a clear definition between

the existing traditional church building and the more modern addition. This is considered to be an appropriate approach to the design of new extensions to a historic building.

Therefore, on this basis, no concerns are raised to the general design and proposed use of materials for the proposed development. Suitably worded planning conditions would be imposed to secure appropriate materials of external construction. In view of the above, it is considered that the design of the proposed development could be successfully accommodated on the site without causing undue harm to the character of the street scene or the visual amenity of the area. As such, the proposal is considered to comply with Core Strategy DPD policies H-1 and SIE-1 and the Design of Residential Development SPD.

Highway Safety and Parking Issues

The planning application has been accompanied by a Transport Statement that has been prepared by SK Transport Planning. The TS provides information in relation to the existing and proposed church activities and confirms that the proposed works are to meet the current needs of the existing congregation and the community which use the church. There would be no change to the existing use or how the site is accessed and there would be no material change to the numbers of visitors to the church for any of the groups, services or sessions as a result of the proposed works. The statement confirms that with regard to changes to the number of vehicular movements to and from the site, it is not expected that there will be a material change to the number of vehicular movements to and from the church. Representatives from the church have confirmed that on busy sessions and events the on-site curtilage is fully utilised, with some parking taking place on residential streets. This is an existing situation and would not be exacerbated or increased by the proposed development works.

The main vehicular access into the site is currently from Crescent Park, with 2 no. secondary gated accesses from Didsbury Road. Didsbury Road has 'no waiting at any time' restrictions along the site frontage. There is limited on street parking to the south side of Didsbury Road. There are no restrictions on parking on Crescent Park other than those protecting the junction with Didsbury Road. It has been noted by the Council's Highway officer that properties on Crescent Park benefit from some degree of off-street parking.

The proposed development includes parking for 26 vehicles including space for 2 mobility impaired users. The Transport Note submitted with the application outlines the anticipated vehicular traffic resulting from the development and its accessibility by means other than by private car. Regular bus services connect the site to the wider Stockport area and beyond.

The submitted TS states that the development proposals would deliver material betterment to the overall parking demands that the church generates, by formalising the car parking within the curtilage of the site, so it can be used at all times of the year and in all weather conditions. Currently, the existing parking areas to the front and side of the church suffer with poor drainage, which makes large areas of the site curtilage unusable in poor weather conditions. The proposals will deliver on-site parking facilities that are usable all year round. Therefore, the Highway officer agrees that the formalisation of the car park will enable year-round parking within the site, and as such lessening the potential demand on adjacent streets.

It is not judged that the development will result in any severe impact on the operation of the local highway, such as to justify and recommendation for refusal on highway grounds. Vehicle access points to the site are currently provided with dropped kerbs and footway crossings and two of these are to be retained. The two access points are to be designated as 'in' and 'out' with appropriate signage. Appropriate vehicle visibility splays are in place given width of footway. Pedestrian visibility splays are to be provided and retained to each side of vehicle exits. A separate pedestrian access is to be provided from Didsbury Road.

With regard to EV charging, the TS confirms that the spaces closest to the main building entrance will have ducting installed to future-proof the provision of charging points if there is a need or demand to provide them. Full details of this has been requested by the Highway officer via an appropriately worded condition. Details of the proposed parking/driveway construction and associated drainage information has been requested again via condition, to be provided together with appropriate signage at entrance/exit and within site, including markings for bays.

Therefore, there are no objections to the proposals from the Council's Highway officer subject to conditions relating to the submission of a construction method statement, highway conditions surveys of Didsbury Road and Crescent Park, details of vehicle access points, car parking areas, EV charging facilities and cycle parking.

In conclusion, in the absence of objections from the Highway Engineer and subject to the imposition of the conditions recommended by the Highway Engineer, it is considered that the proposed development should not have a material impact on the local highway network. As such, the proposal complies with Core Strategy DPD policies SD-6, SIE-1, CS9, T-1, T-2 and T-3 and the Sustainable Transport SPD.

Residential Amenity

As outlined above, the site is bounded on most sides by existing residential properties. Therefore, the assessment of the proposals on existing levels of amenity must be carefully considered. The closest existing residential properties to the proposed extensions are those at 2 to 6 Crescent Park and 110a Didsbury Road. This is to the western side of the church where the extensions are proposed. However, impacts on other properties along Crescent Park to the rear of the site and across the road have also been considered.

The number of objections received against the application is acknowledged. All of the comments made by local residents have been assessed in full and efforts have been made by the applicants to try and either respond to or address the concerns raised. However as outlined above, the existing use of the building, the hours of use of the site and existing parking levels and traffic movements to and from the site are not being considered by this application. The aim of the proposals are to improve the facilities for the people currently using the site, but also to try and improve conditions for residents living around the site. This is by providing proper and usable car parking spaces that could be utilised all year round, and to remove a prefabricated building with a poor quality appearance and very little sound proofing and replace it with a purpose built extension with modern insulation, double glazed windows and high quality materials.

As outlined in the application submission, the proposed development seeks to improve the existing facilities available to church users, to sustain the ongoing activities, rather than significantly expand the church. This is apparent in the proposed floor areas, where of the total 131.1 m² of new internal floorspace being created (figure calculation on the basis of the existing church hall to be demolished), a large proportion of this is taken up by entrance lobbies, circulation spaces, internal walls and new accessible toilets. Therefore, the increase in floorspace over the existing buildings is negligible, demonstrating that the proposals do not seek to 'expand' the church, but meet the requirements of the current congregation numbers and improve existing facilities. Therefore, it is not anticipated that there would be a significant increase in activity that would cause a detriment to amenity from noise and general disturbance.

Therefore, the main matters for consideration under this application are the potential impacts of the new built form and other external changes on the amenities of the surrounding properties and not the use itself.

It is acknowledged that the proposals would bring the built form of the church much closer to the western site boundary and as a result, to the rear and side boundaries of the adjacent properties. The western site boundary is shared by the private rear gardens and the habitable room windows on the rear elevations of these dwellings. In terms of a potential overbearing / overshadowing impact from the extensions in this location, it is considered that this would not be significant due to the presence of the existing and substantial church building. The extensions are only single storey, albeit the floor levels are elevated to be in line with the existing internal floor levels of the existing church building, but are significantly lower in height and mass than the existing church building. From an overshadowing perspective, it is not considered that there would be significant additional overshadowing created over and above the existing levels from the church building. This is due to the position and orientation of the existing buildings and extensions.

In terms of overbearing impacts, again it is considered that due to the presence of the existing church building, the mature trees, hedging and fencing along the site boundaries, along with the new planting proposed via the landscaping scheme, that the new extensions would not create an overbearing impact on the adjacent properties. The use of lighter coloured materials, the design of the side extension with a roof sloping away from the site boundary, and the presence of breaks in the fenestration such as windows, all contribute to a reduction in overbearing impacts compared to long expanses of solid brick wall / built form.

The proposals include new high level windows in the side elevation facing the site boundary and therefore, the potential for overlooking and loss of privacy is increased over the existing situation. A plan showing the existing and resulting distances between existing windows and those proposed has been submitted to accompany the application. This shows that the proposed new windows would be located between 19.43m and 21.8m to the habitable room windows on the rear elevations of Nos. 2 and 2A Crescent Park and 19.9m and 21.5m away from the habitable room windows on the rear elevation of No. 4 Crescent Park, which remains a considerable distance away.

Objections have been received from local residents in relation to the presence of these windows and concerns in relation to a loss of privacy. The application is accompanied by a further sectional plan through the extension, which shows the internal sill height of the high-level windows in the side extension. This is

confirmed at a height of 1.875m, which is above the height of 1.7m that is usually required to protect privacy. On this basis, it would not be possible to stand and look out of these windows and into the adjacent gardens or habitable rooms of the adjacent properties. Therefore, there would be no policy requirement for these windows to be removed or for them to be opaquely glazed.

However, notwithstanding this and in response to the objections received, the applicant has amended the proposals to make the majority of these windows opaquely glazed. This can be seen on the proposed Elevation drawings in the plans pack. However, the applicant has stated that in the two rooms that are not served by external doors to provide natural light, the high-level windows have been retained as clear glazing. However, on the basis of the proposed sill height, it is not considered that there would be any loss of privacy or overlooking created from the windows even if clear glass was installed. Comments have also been made in relation to the potential for furniture/shelving/staging to be placed inside the room that would enable people to climb up and look through the clear glazed windows. However, as can be seen from the internal floor plans for these rooms, the area closest to the windows would be used like a corridor due to the position of the internal doors. Therefore, any furniture/shelving etc would actually cause an obstruction to people using these doors and moving between the rooms. On this basis, it is highly unlikely that there would be anything installed in this location that would allow overlooking to occur, nor would there be any desire to do this by people using the office or children's ministry rooms.

Finally in relation to privacy, objections have been received in relation to the door on the front elevation of the side extension that is served by steps up. It is claimed that people could stand on the top of these steps and look over into adjacent windows and gardens. The applicant has confirmed that the steps and platform into the foyer/office would be used for occasional access only, and it is not anticipated that this will be used intensively like the main church doors on the front elevation. A combination of this and the existing tall boundary treatments and proposed landscaping in this area of the site, should ensure that this element would not impact on the privacy currently enjoyed by the adjacent properties.

For similar reasons, objections have been received in relation to the patio doors, platform and steps on the rear elevation of the proposed side extension. It is claimed that the patio doors and elevation steps would create a loss of privacy to the properties to the rear of the site. However, the rear elevation of the new extension is set much further back than the end / rear elevation of the existing church building. As can be seen on the site location plan, this shows that the view of any of the existing habitable room windows from the proposed patio doors, platform and steps would be obscured by the existing building. The top step of the proposed steps would be 13.8m away from the site boundary with the adjacent property, which is considered to be an acceptable distance in this context. It is acknowledged that the demolition of the existing church hall in this location will open up this boundary and remove a wall that currently provides screening. However, it is considered that due to the distance to the boundary and with some improved soft landscaping along this boundary, there should not be a significant loss of privacy created within the rear garden of the adjacent property.

Moving on from matters of privacy, objections have been received in relation to the open area to the rear of the site annotated as a play area. In response to this, the applicant has advised that the external play space shown on the plans is to support the existing ancillary use of the church. After services, children that attend the church currently play around the building but mainly in the car park.

This is an unsafe situation for young children, and therefore an improvement to that has been proposed. Through the demolition of the existing hut at the rear of the site, a secure, gated area can be created for children to play in for the short period after a church service. The church have confirmed that there is no intention to make this an equipped play area for all-day use, and as such, it will not be to rival the existing public open space and play area across the road at Crescent Park. Nor would it be appropriate for young children to leave the site and cross the road to use the existing public park, if their parents were still at the church site after a service. The submitted plans show that the area would be gated when not in use to discourage anti-social behaviour.

The fall back position must be noted here, in that the existing hut could be demolished and the space created could be used for this purpose without any formal planning permission, as it would fall under the existing use of the church site. Notwithstanding this fact, for the use as outlined, it is not considered that there would be any additional noise created from this area over and above the established ancillary use of the church's external areas.

Objections and queries have also been raised in relation to the proposed creche. Again, it is assumed that this is for the use of the church, its members and if necessary, for the community groups using the church. It is not proposed to be a separate commercial enterprise that would be a material change of use of the space, and which could attract different operations at the site. This change of use would warrant a separate planning application for the change of use of this space.

Finally, concerns have been raised in relation to the increased presence of cars within the site in a more formalised car park, in relation to general noise and disturbance in proximity to the adjacent dwellings. It has to be acknowledged that this area is currently used as a car park for the church, and so this proposal does not constitute a new introduction of car movements in this location. The area immediately adjacent to the existing private rear gardens has been protected by the introduction of a new soft landscaped area including the planting of a new tree. The formalised parking along the site boundary is located adjacent to the gable end of this property and the front garden of the property, which is wholly turned over as hardstanding for the parking of vehicles at this property. Therefore, it is not considered that there would be any increase in general noise, disturbance or fumes from the formalisation of the existing car park, or a detrimental impact on the amenity of the adjacent properties from these works.

On the basis of the above, it is considered that the proposed development as a whole, would not cause significant harm to existing occupiers by reason of overshadowing, loss of outlook, overlooking or loss of privacy. On this basis, the development is considered to accord with policies CS8, SIE1 and SIE3 of the Core Strategy together with the relevant guidance within the NPPF.

Trees and Landscaping

The proposed development site is located within the existing place of worship site predominantly on the existing informal grounds and hard standing areas. The plot is comprised largely of landscape areas, hardstanding, informal grounds and associated infrastructure.

The proposed development is not within or affected by a Conservation Area and there are no legally protected trees within this site or affected by this

development. A full tree survey has been submitted as part of the planning application to show the condition and amenity levels of the existing neighbouring trees and where applicable, which trees will have a potential impact on the proposed development.

The Arboricultural Impact Assessment confirms that a total of seventeen individual trees, two groups and four hedges were surveyed and plotted in order to assess their health and dimensions in accordance with the British Standard. In general the trees of the site were found to be in reasonable condition for their age and species. The quality rating for the trees on or affecting this site can be summarised as follows:

A – 2 trees (T1 & T9)

B – 6 trees (T5, T11, T13, T15, T16 & T17)

C – 15 trees/groups (T2, T3, H1, H2, T4, G1, T6, H3, T7, T8, G2, T10, T12, T14 & H4)

Out of the trees above, 3 trees would require removal to facilitate the development (T2, T3 and T7). All three of these trees fall within category C and it is considered that the loss of these trees can be mitigated through replacement planting. The submitted landscaping scheme is comprehensive and shows that it is proposed to plant 11 new trees as part of the soft landscaping works. These are mostly to the front of the building and tot the side onto Crescent Park.

The AIA also identifies that there are a number of trees either on-site or within adjacent gardens that could be affected by the construction works. However, a number of mitigation measures are proposed within the report that if out in place, would protect these trees and ensure that they can be successfully retained during and post development. This includes tree protection fencing, careful excavation within root protection areas, installation of no dig surfacing adjacent to T3 and that all work is done under the supervision of an appointed arboriculturist.

A detailed landscaping scheme has been submitted as part of the planning application submitted, which clearly shows enhancements of the site and surrounding environment to improve the local biodiversity and amenity of the area. This includes a range of tree species, shrub planting, specimen shrubs, native hedgerow and ornamental shade mix plants.

Significant concerns were raised by local residents in relation to the plans originally submitted with the application, which appeared to show the removal of the existing large mature hedge along the western boundary of the site. The applicant has since confirmed that this was an error and that there was no intention for this hedge to be removed. As such, the plans have been updated to ensure that this has been corrected and the retention of the hedge along this and other boundaries is confirmed.

In view of the above, in the absence of objections from the Arboricultural Officer and subject to conditional control, the proposal is considered acceptable with regard to its impact on trees and to the provision of good quality landscaping across the site, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policies SIE-1 and SIE-3.

Ecology and Biodiversity

The site has no nature conservation designations, as listed in Stockport's current Local Plan (e.g. Site of Biological Importance, Local Nature Reserve and Green Chain). It has however been identified as an opportunity area within the Local

Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) pilot study for Greater Manchester. This is not necessarily a barrier to development and does not confer protection or prevention of land uses but shows that such areas have been prioritised for restoring and linking up habitats. This also means that the site would score as 'high strategic significance' within any biodiversity metric calculations.

Habitats on site have been mapped as part of an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey carried out in June 2023 (Rachel Hacking Ecology Ltd Ecological Appraisal, 2023). A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment has been carried out with findings reported in the submitted Biodiversity Impact Assessment Report (Rachel Hacking Ecology Ltd, 2023). Phase 1 Habitats have been transposed into UKHAB and the DEFRA Metric V4.0 has been used to assess baseline conditions and inform the BNG assessment.

There is considered to be sufficient ecological information available to inform determination of the current application. The bat survey found no evidence of roosting bats and assessed the church as offering negligible bat roosting potential. No potential bat roosting features were recorded within any trees on site. Works are therefore considered to be of very low risk to roosting bats.

Biodiversity enhancements and measurable gains for biodiversity are required in line with local (paragraph 3.345 of the LDF) and national planning policy (NPPF). In relation to the current site, biodiversity enhancement measures are particularly welcomed given the designation of the site as an opportunity area within the LNRS for Greater Manchester. The BNG Impact Assessment and Metric calculations that have been submitted with the application indicate that an overall BNG will be delivered on site. This is a measurable overall measurable BNG for both Habitat and Hedgerow Biodiversity Units and so accords with the NPPF (note that this application pre-dates mandatory BNG required for minor applications under the Environment Act 2021).

The Ecology report recommends the provision of bat roosting and bird nesting boxes on site. No details regarding the proposed number and type of boxes have been provided at this stage. It is considered that a minimum of two bat boxes and two bird boxes would be appropriate. The boxes should be woodstone/woodcrete to maximise longevity and should be placed in unlit locations. Details of the proposed type and location of the boxes should be submitted to the LPA for review and this can be secured by condition.

On the basis of the above, the Council's Nature Development team have confirmed that there are no objections to the proposed development subject to conditions and informatives relating to bat protection, nesting birds, precautionary measures, invasive species, tree protection, biodiversity enhancement, landscape management sensitive lighting and ecology resurvey after 2 years.

In view of the above, in the absence of objections from the Council Nature Development Officer and subject to the imposition of suitably worded planning conditions, the proposal is considered acceptable with regard to its impact on protected species, biodiversity and the ecological interest of the site, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-3.

Drainage

The application is accompanied by a Drainage Technical Note. This explains that the site benefits from an existing connection to the UU public sewer network,

however it is unclear to which sewer the site drains. It acknowledges that all new developments should seek to adhere to the hierarchy of surface water disposal and achieve the most sustainable viable method of disposal. Ground conditions at the site suggest that infiltration may be a viable method of disposal and as such, site specific infiltration testing and groundwater monitoring should be undertaken to inform an infiltration based surface water drainage design. In the event that infiltration is unviable, surface water should be disposed to one of the UU public surface water sewers in Crescent Park or Didsbury Road. If an existing drainage connection as above does not exist, a new surface water drainage connection should be provided, subject to approval from UU under S106 of the Water Industry Act. Regardless of the method of disposal, surface water should be managed on site using sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and surface water should be prevented from leaving the site and entering the public highway.

The reconfiguration works proposed to the site surrounding the church building retains and improves soft landscaping and the submitted plans show the use of grasscrete for the parking spaces, paving for the pedestrian zones and a permeable surfacing solution for the vehicular routes.

Therefore, on this basis, it is considered that the appropriate drainage of the development could be secured by conditional control. This would require the submission, approval and implementation of an appropriate surface water drainage system; and management and maintenance of such a drainage system at all times thereafter.

Subject to compliance with such conditions, it is considered that the proposed development could be drained in a sustainable and appropriate manner without the risk of flooding elsewhere, in accordance with saved UDP policy EP1.7 and Core Strategy DPD policies SD-6 and SIE-3.

Noise and Odour

In addition to the consideration of general noise from the site provided above under the Residential Amenity section, concerns have been raised in relation to noise and odours from the proposed new kitchen. The applicant has confirmed within their response to the objections raised, that the kitchen would not be commercial with the requirement of external extraction systems. The kitchen would be more domestic in nature and cooking activities at the church would not be significant. Therefore, on this basis, it was not considered to be necessary to request a noise impact assessment or odour control assessment, as no externally mounted extraction equipment is required or proposed.

In terms of noise from construction, a construction management plan will be required for submission via an appropriately worded condition. An informative relating to acceptable construction hours is recommended, for the protection of noise sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the site. Should piling be required as part of the construction phase, an informative is provided to also inform the process. Finally, in relation to dust, an informative is included to ensure a site specific dust management plan is produced and a copy retained on site during the construction process.

Air Quality

The application site is located within the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) for the Borough. As such, information submitted to accompany the planning

application confirms that from an operational perspective, there would be no material change to the number of visitors to the church as a result of the proposed development works. There are no other proposed works that would result in any impacts on air quality, such as externally mounted extract systems as outlined above. Therefore, on this basis, there would be no impacts from the ongoing operations of the church on air quality over and above the existing use of the site.

In terms of the proposed demolition and construction works, the scale of the development works would fall under the criteria for a full Air Quality Impact Assessment (more than 100 additional light duty vehicle traffic flows on local roads). However, notwithstanding this, the applicant has agreed to submit further air quality information via an appropriately worded condition once further construction and demolition works information is available prior to the commencement of such works at the site.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF establishes three dimensions to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental and Paragraph 8 of the NPPF indicates that these should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

The existing use of the site as a Church with its ancillary community uses, is not being considered as part of this planning application. Permission is only sought for the physical works being proposed at the site in the form of extensions and other external works to the surrounding car parking and garden areas. These physical works have been assessed in relation to the visual impacts of the proposals, heritage impacts, any potential highway safety and parking impacts, the loss of some of the soft landscaping, and the potential impacts of the proposed extensions on the amenity of the surrounding properties and are considered to be acceptable in this case.

The locally listed building at the site does require renovation internally and needs to be adapted to provide appropriate facilities for a modern church and community. It is acknowledged that the proposed extensions would have an impact on the setting and character of the non-designated heritage asset. However, the public benefits from the scheme as a whole must be given weight in this case.

It is considered that the siting, scale and design of the proposed development could be successfully accommodated on the site without causing undue harm to the visual amenity of the area or the residential amenity of surrounding properties. In the absence of objections from relevant consultees and subject to conditional control, the proposal is considered acceptable with regard to the issues of traffic generation, parking and highway safety; impact on trees; impact on protected species and ecology and drainage

In view of the above, notwithstanding the fact that approval of the development would constitute a departure from the development plan, the proposal is considered to represent sustainable development. On this basis, notwithstanding the objection raised to the proposal, in accordance with the requirements of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant subject to Conditions