

Consultation Response from KC, Conservation and Design
2020/90479 Parkwood Methodist Church, Parkwood Road, Longwood, Huddersfield, HD3 4TT
Alterations to convert former church to 12 residential units, formation of parking areas and widen vehicular access (Listed Building within a Conservation Area)
Date Responded: 30/10/20
Responding Officer: Craig McHugh
Responding Ref: HUD 32/363

Revised following receipt of amended plans

- Revised Proposed Site Layout 17-D23-07E
- Revised Plans and Elevations 17-D23-06

Summary

Parkwood United Methodist Free Church is a good example of a mid-19th century Methodist place of worship in a classical style with, until recently, a well-preserved interior. It is listed grade II. The building requires a new use, however the impact of the proposed conversion to 12 apartments would result in a very high level of harm, which has neither been justified nor demonstrated to be the optimum viable use. Conservation and Design object to the proposed development on heritage grounds particularly with regards to paragraphs 193, 194 and 196 of the NPPF. The current proposals should either be withdrawn or refused.

Significance of the heritage assets affected

Parkwood United Methodist Free Church is a good example of a mid-19th century Methodist place of worship in a classical style with, until recently, a well-preserved interior. It is listed grade II. The Church is dated 1868 and was extended to the north in 1907. There are four leaded and stained glass windows commemorating members of the congregation and the fallen of the Second World War. Remaining internal features of interest include the lobby entrance, wainscot panelling, moulded ceiling beams, cornices, arched lintels spanning from console brackets and an ornamental ceiling rose forming part of a ventilation system. Some of the northern end of the basement has been refitted in the late 20th century, but there are cast iron columns, panelled doors and door surrounds of interest and a staircase with wainscot panelling connecting the ground and first floors.

Landscaped memorial gardens and the graveyard to the west contribute to the significance of the listed building as do boundary features such as stone walls and iron railings. The south entrance gates are separately listed grade II.

The church occupies a prominent position on raised ground and makes positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Longwood Edge Conservation Area.

The timber pews, choir stalls and organ have been removed without listed building consent, apparently after the building was closed for worship and therefore not subject to an exemption under section 60 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Impact of the proposals on significance

The proposed development would lead to the complete loss of the plan form of the building, with the main body of the church subdivided horizontally and vertically, the loss of all interior joinery and the loss or hiding of its decorative ceiling beams. All windows and doors would be replaced including the memorial windows.

With regards to paragraph 193 of the NPPF, the level of harm would be very high and little short of substantial harm.

Relevant Policies/Guidance

A viable new use is needed for the building and this has strong policy support from Local Plan Policy LP35 3(c) which requires that we secure a sustainable future for heritage assets at risk. Places of worship are identified as an at risk group of historic buildings across the district. However, the NPPF requires that any harm to the listed building and conservation area requires clear and convincing justification and that any harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. Great weight should be given to the conservation of the heritage assets in making that judgement (paras. 193, 194 & 196).

A heritage statement has been provided. Residential use it is asserted “is the least intrusive on the fabric of the building” but no evidence is provided as to alternate uses and the impacts they might have. It is stated that, “the proposed use (or any other alternative use other than as a place of worship) dictates that all the timber pews, pulpit, choir stalls and organ will need to be removed to be able to carry out the conversion”. This is contested. There are a great many converted listed places of worship where, with some creativity, at least some of these features are preserved as part of conversion schemes. Such losses are not inevitable.

No evidence has been submitted as to the viability of the proposed scheme or less harmful conversion options other than to state that “maximising the number of individual units enables the ongoing management and maintenance costs to be spread over as many units as possible. The successful conversion of Parkwood Mills into apartments immediately to the south of the chapel demonstrated how this new use of a redundant building can be successfully achieved”. Parkwood Mill and the application site are very different buildings in terms of their historic and architectural features. Conversion of the mill has released over 100 apartments into the local market, it has to be questioned whether there is a demand for further housing of this type.

National Planning Practice Guidance advises that the if there is only one viable use, that use is the optimum viable use. If there is a range of alternative economically viable uses, the optimum viable use is the one likely to cause the least harm to the significance of the asset, not just through necessary initial changes, but also as a result of subsequent wear and tear and likely future changes. The optimum viable use may not necessarily be the most economically viable one.

A very high level of harm would result from the proposed development. This requires very robust justification including a viability appraisal for this and other less harmful alternative uses or residential conversion schemes, which has still not been provided. The tests of paragraphs 194 and 196 have not been met.

Conclusion

Conservation and Design object to the proposed development on heritage grounds, particularly with regards to paragraphs 193, 194 and 196 of the NPPF. It would cause a very high level of harm to Parkwood Methodist Church and some harm to Longwood Edge Conservation Area, that harm would still be less than substantial harm.

Recommendations

The current application should be withdrawn or refused. The applicant should consider alternative less harmful proposals for conversion.

If a residential use is the most appropriate use, then a less intensive conversion should be considered which seeks to:

- retain the memorial windows in situ
- retain interior features wherever possible through a creative approach to subdivision and interior design
- retain some sense of the layout of the building and the volume of the main body of the church
- retain more of the memorial gardens to better preserve the landscape setting of the church and the character and appearance of the conservation area

The building is currently in a good to fair state of repair. However, there are numerous instances where gutters are blocked and not discharging into the downpipes correctly due to missing or slipped connections. These should be attended to as a matter of urgency to prevent the building deteriorating. Roof timbers embedded in the wall tops are particularly vulnerable and there is already evidence of water staining to the south east corner of the church hall. Leadwork to the roof should be marked with SmartWater or a similar theft deterrent and notices displayed accordingly.