

DCAdmin

From:
Sent: 10 September 2023 17:41
To: DCAdmin
Cc:
Subject: application number 2023/92128 at location Church of the Holy Innocents, Vicarage Road, Dewsbury, WF12 9PD

Categories:

Holy Innocents, Vicarage Road, Dewsbury 2023/92128

Thankyou for your consultation.

The best use for an historic but redundant church is one that exploits its nature as an auditorium and maintains its role as building open to the broad community. Churches were intended to be public buildings.

Adaptation as two houses (with an apparently irreversible division that cuts right across the nave) fights with those two principles.

With a building of this quality (listed at Grade 11 but definitely in the upper level of that grade if not higher) alienating it from continued public use is a major loss to the community and we presume that the presumption and preference will lie with a thorough search for such a use before consideration goes to the building's privatisation as housing. This is the more so because the building was only recently in receipt of £177,000 in public money in a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is a truism that to build an auditorium of this quality at today's prices would cost several millions. Its potential for the broader community needs to be exhausted before it is cut up as housing.

Dealing with the application as lodged :

1. We can welcome the express retention of the stained glass , the font (we presume with its cover), the pulpit and the memorial plaques. However

we urge great caution over the application of secondary glazing to the inner face of stained glass. A second skin of glass will have to be installed with provision for adequate ventilation of the cavity but even with that, the reflections will make it more difficult to appreciate the stained glass whilst any second skin makes access for repair and maintenance more complicated. Drawing A16 implies at annotation b that there will also be “external sheeting covering the existing stained glass windows”. Really? An internal and an external skin will distort the appreciation of the glass both inside and out. The need for external protection is not proven. In our experience converted churches suffer markedly less vandalism than churches still in religious use. A house is likely to be occupied far more frequently than a place of worship. Moreover if “sheeting” means polycarbonate sheeting that is highly inadvisable as poorer quality polycarbonate goes opaque over time, ruining the visual effectiveness of the stained glass and providing a more visible surface for bird lime and other staining.

The stained glass is an important set by William Wailes, so well known in his day that he was able to build himself a substantial mansion – Saltwell Towers in Gateshead. And so appreciated now by his hometown that its conservation a decade ago with a Lottery grant involved the permanent location of an exhibition on him and his stained glass.

2. The holiest and richest part of the building is the chancel and sanctuary to the East. It was this section of the interior that cries out to be preserved intact. I cannot find any confirmation on Drawing A13 that any of the choirstalls, the reredos or encaustic floor tiles are to stay, although the section (Drawing A17) implies that the reredos and organ pipes are to remain. Drawing A11 refers to the retention of the organ but the base including the console and return panelling appears to go.

Can it be spelt out expressly what is and is not to stay in the chancel?

The woodwork is self-consciously more elaborate than that in the nave, it is all original and the work of Mallinson and Healey – and some were carved by that rare phenomenon in the 19th century, a female craftsman – Catherine Mawer working for Mawer and Ingle, who were the contractors.

The organ by the way is “listed” on the National Pipe Organ Register, run by the British Institute of Organ Studies, under reference F00032.

We can welcome the absence of any partitioning in the chancel.

3. It is hard to resist the loss of the nave pews (which would probably have to go in an auditorial use) but we urge that a representative example be retained, if necessary pushed against an outer wall.
4. The roofs are to be peppered with rooflights, 46 on my count (Drawing A14). Moreover, whereas those on the two aisles are placed evenly, those on the nave are grouped much more capriciously, disturbing the clean lines and sweep. This fights with the nobility of the present exterior and will need to be compellingly justified before being permitted.

A design for the rooflight will need to be produced now or as a Reserved Matter.

5. The quality of the drawings is excellent but we infer that the work is not to be entrusted to a conservation architect or surveyor. At Companies House the single person registered with SC1 Property is described as an “Architectural Technician”. Work on a building of this quality should be entrusted to a professional with appropriate conservation credentials and preferably experience too of working on churches.
6. The site is important for its grouping of the vicarage and school with the church, all designed by Mallinson and Healey and within the church grounds the sundial and boundary walls are both listed. We presume that both of these will stay intact and that any management regime for the church building will extend to these as well.
7. Is there a management regime for the several trees that are protected under TPOs ?
8. It does seem legitimate for a planning authority to ask how the site as a whole (church, boundary wall, sundial and the grounds) is to be managed given the projected split in occupation between two households. Will

there be a service company ? How will maintenance of the tower and spire, potentially a very considerable liability for the future, be shared ?

As a courtesy a copy of this email is being shared with the applicants.

We will of course comment again once the matters outlined above have been addressed.

Matthew Saunders
ECCLESIASTICAL CASEWORKER



www.hbap.org.uk

Formerly Ancient Monuments Society

St Ann's Vestry Hall
2 Church Entry
London, EC4V 5HB

Historic Buildings & Places,
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