



United Church

Heritage Statement

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Aim of this Report

This Heritage Statement has been prepared to accompany a full planning application for the proposed conversion of the former Marsden United Church and part of the associated Sunday School, Warehouse Hill Road, Marsden, into residential use. The scheme proposes the creation of seven dwellings within the principal church building and a further townhouse within the Sunday School.

The site lies within the designated Marsden Conservation Area. Although the church is not statutorily listed, it is identified within the Marsden Conservation Area Appraisal as a building of local significance which positively contributes to the character and appearance of the area. As such, it is treated as a non-designated heritage asset for the purposes of national and local planning policy.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Describe the site and its wider heritage context;
- Summarise relevant statutory, national and local policy considerations;
- Assess the architectural, historic and townscape significance of the buildings;
- Evaluate the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the site and the wider Conservation Area; and
- Demonstrate how the proposals preserve the character and appearance of the Marsden Conservation Area while securing a viable long-term use for the buildings.

This document should be read alongside the Design and Access Statement and the submitted architectural drawings.

1.2 Approach

The assessment has been prepared in accordance with Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and follows the structured approach set out in Historic England's guidance on describing heritage significance.

A site inspection was undertaken to assess:

- The architectural character and condition of the church and Sunday School;
- Their contribution to the streetscape and wider townscape;
- The relationship between the buildings and their immediate setting;
- The spatial qualities and surviving historic fabric within the interiors.

The assessment draws upon:

- The Marsden Conservation Area Appraisal;
- Historic mapping evidence;
- Visual analysis of the surrounding urban grain and topography;
- Review of the submitted design proposals.

The methodology follows a clear sequence:

- Identification of the significance of the Conservation Area.
- Identification of the significance of the application site.
- Assessment of the contribution the site makes to its setting.
- Evaluation of the likely impact of the proposed development on that significance.

The analysis distinguishes between architectural, historic, and townscape interest, and considers whether the proposals would result in harm, and if so, whether that harm would be less than substantial in policy terms.



External visual of proposal.

1.0 Introduction

1.3 Site Location & Context

The application site is located on Warehouse Hill Road within the historic core of Marsden, approximately 7.5 miles west of Huddersfield. Marsden sits within the Colne Valley and is defined by steep valley sides, a strong topographical character, and tightly arranged stone-built development stepping up the landscape.

The Marsden Conservation Area Appraisal identifies the settlement as one shaped by its dramatic valley setting, industrial development, and cohesive use of natural stone. The interplay between built form and topography is described as fundamental to the area's character, with buildings perceived in layers across the slopes and framed by mature vegetation.

The church occupies a visually prominent but spatially nuanced position within this context. Set back slightly from the primary street alignment of Warehouse Hill Road, it sits within a plot characterised by changes in level and mature trees to the side and rear. From lower points in the village, the church reads as an elevated civic structure contributing to the varied skyline. From higher ground, it becomes partially enclosed within the wooded valley backdrop. This layered visual presence reflects the townscape qualities identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

Architecturally, the surrounding context is dominated by stone-built terraces, community buildings and former industrial structures typical of the Colne Valley vernacular. The consistent use of coursed stone, vertically proportioned openings and pitched slate roofs establishes a strong material unity across the Conservation Area. The United Church, constructed in 1931, reflects this material tradition while introducing a larger civic scale and ecclesiastical articulation into the streetscape.

The Sunday School building sits immediately adjacent to the church and forms part of the historic religious complex. Historically accessed from Victoria Road, it shares both functional and visual association with the church. Under the current proposals, access arrangements are rationalised via Warehouse Hill Road, reinforcing the spatial relationship between the buildings while responding to the site's topographical constraints.

The site includes a modest area of hardstanding to the front, historically used for parking, and is bounded in part by mature trees and changes in ground level which contribute to the enclosure and landscape character identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

The church and Sunday School therefore occupy a sensitive and prominent position within the Marsden Conservation Area, contributing through their materiality, scale and historic function to the established character of the village core.

2.0 Planning Policy Context

2.1 Statutory Context

As the site lies within the Marsden Conservation Area, the proposals are subject to the statutory duties set out in Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires decision-makers to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

While the church is not statutorily listed, its identification as a locally significant building within the Conservation Area Appraisal means it constitutes a non-designated heritage asset, and its significance is a material consideration in planning decisions.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's approach to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. It requires development proposals to be assessed in a manner proportionate to the significance of the heritage asset affected.

The NPPF places particular emphasis on:

- Sustaining and enhancing heritage assets;
- Securing their optimum viable use; and
- Supporting development that conserves significance while allowing appropriate adaptation.

The proposed reuse of the church directly aligns with these principles by securing a long-term use for a vacant heritage asset, retaining its architectural character, and avoiding the risk of deterioration through redundancy.

2.3 Local Policy Context

The Kirklees Local Plan provides the local policy framework for heritage and design. Policy LP35 (Historic Environment) requires development to preserve or enhance heritage assets and their settings, including buildings within conservation areas and non-designated heritage assets.

Policy LP24 (Design) seeks high-quality design that responds positively to local character, scale, and materials. The proposal's approach - retaining the existing envelope, working within the historic structure, and minimising external alteration - aligns with this policy.

The Marsden Conservation Area Appraisal is a key material consideration and identifies the United Church as making a positive contribution to the Conservation Area through its architectural quality, materials, and community role (Kirklees Council, 2010).

3.0 Context & Heritage Understanding

3.1 Wider Setting - Marsden Conservation Area

Marsden lies within the Colne Valley and is defined by steep valley sides, terraced development stepping up the slopes, and the historic influence of industry along the river corridor. The Marsden Conservation Area Appraisal identifies topography as a defining characteristic, noting how the settlement is shaped by the valley landscape and how buildings are perceived in layered views across the slopes.

The Appraisal emphasises:

- The consistent use of local natural stone.
- A varied but cohesive roofscape.
- Strong vertical proportions in window openings.
- The presence of mills, civic buildings and places of worship marking key nodes in the settlement.
- The relationship between built form and mature tree cover on valley sides.

The church occupies a prominent position within this framework. Located on Warehouse Hill Road, it sits slightly elevated relative to parts of the surrounding village. From lower viewpoints it reads as a substantial civic structure; from higher ground it becomes partially enclosed by vegetation and neighbouring buildings. This dual perception reflects the layered topography described in the Appraisal and reinforces the building's contribution to the Conservation Area's spatial complexity.

Unlike purely domestic terraces, the church introduces scale and civic articulation into the townscape. Its roof form and massing contribute to the varied skyline that the Appraisal identifies as characteristic of Marsden.

3.2 Historic Development of Marsden

Marsden developed from a rural agricultural settlement into an industrial village during the 18th and 19th centuries, with textile production and associated mills driving expansion. The Conservation Area Appraisal explains that much of the village's character derives from this period of industrial growth, which established the tight grain of stone-built terraces, workshops and communal buildings.

Religious buildings formed an important component of this expansion. Chapels and churches reflected both population growth and the strong nonconformist traditions of West Yorkshire mill communities.

The Appraisal records that there has been a religious meeting house on the site of the United Church since 1790, with successive rebuilding leading to the present 1931 structure. This continuity of use contributes to the site's historic interest and embeds it within the social development of Marsden.

3.3 Character of the United Church

The United Church is a substantial stone-built ecclesiastical building dating from 1931. While not listed, it is specifically identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal as a building of local significance which positively enhances the character of the area.

Architecturally, the building derives interest from:

- Coursed stone construction consistent with Marsden's vernacular palette.
- Large arched openings.
- Prominent stained-glass window on the principal elevation.
- Expressed internal volume and roof structure.
- Symmetrical stone staircases forming part of the circulation hierarchy.

The building demonstrates a clear structural and spatial logic typical of early 20th-century nonconformist church architecture, where the arrangement of nave, ancillary spaces and circulation is legible in plan and elevation.

Its civic scale differentiates it from surrounding domestic terraces while remaining materially consistent with them. This balance between distinction and cohesion underpins its townscape contribution.



Map of Yorkshire from McMaster University Digital Archive, 1771

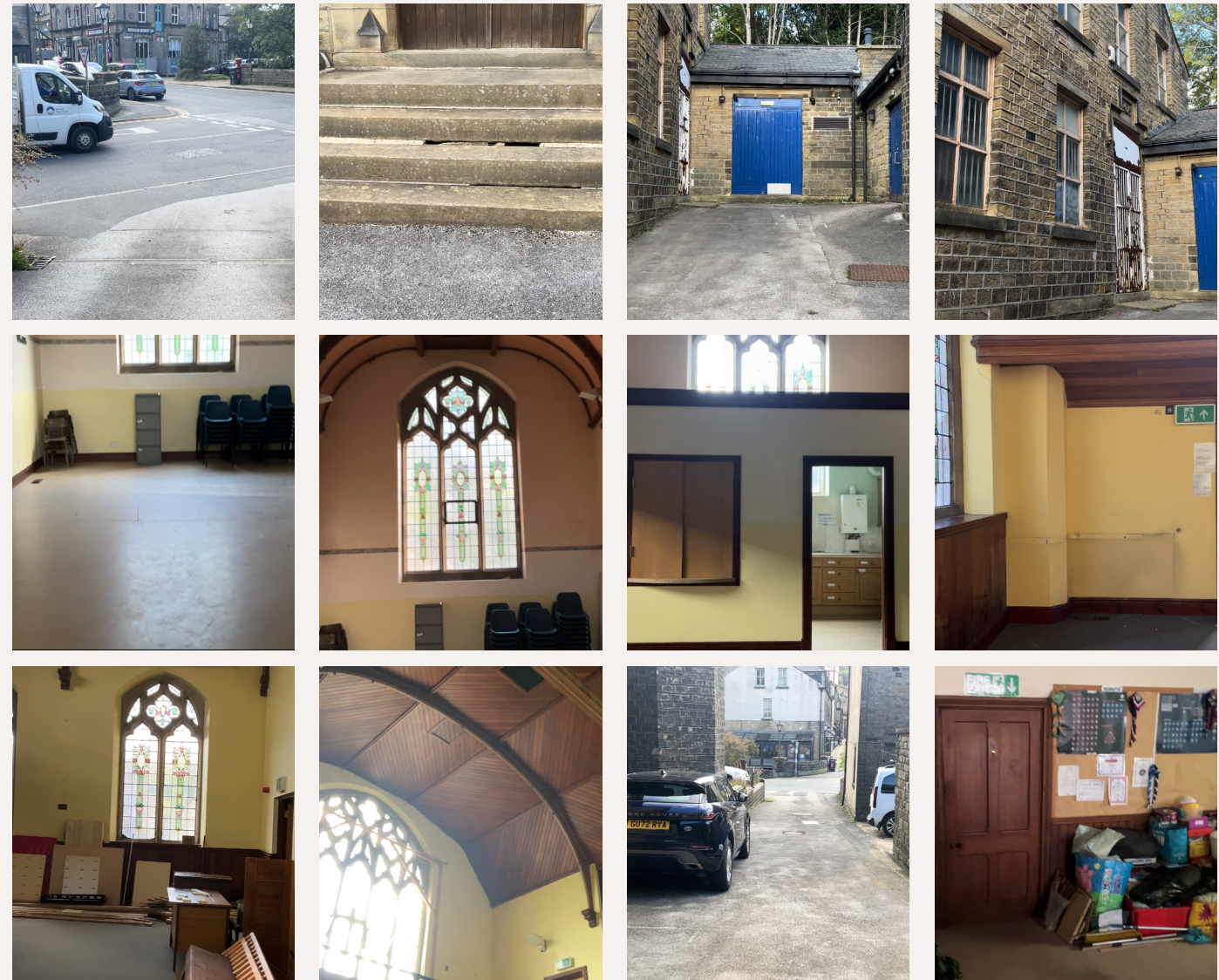


Ordnance Survey map from the National Library of Scotland, 1854.



Ordnance Survey map from the National Library of Scotland, 1892.

3.0 Context & Heritage Understanding



3.4 Existing Building Condition

The United Church retains its principal stone-built form and defining architectural features, including arched openings and stained-glass windows. However, the building clearly reflects incremental adaptation over time. Additions and internal alterations have introduced a mixture of materials, finishes and spatial arrangements, particularly evident within the interior. The result is a layered composition that records different phases of use rather than a single, untouched architectural moment.

Internally, large-volume spaces sit alongside smaller ancillary rooms arranged across varying levels, with later partitions and finishes evidencing continued community use and modification. These successive changes demonstrate the building's inherent flexibility and capacity to evolve. The structure remains robust and capable of accommodating further sensitive adaptation within its existing envelope.

3.0 Context & Heritage Understanding

3.5 The Sunday School

The Sunday School building forms part of the historic religious complex and reflects the broader social function of the church site. Although more modest in scale, it contributes to the group value of the ensemble and reinforces the historic pattern of development along Warehouse Hill Road.

Its relationship to the church, both spatially and historically, enhances the communal significance of the site.

3.6 Assessment of Significance

Archaeological Interest

The Conservation Area Appraisal does not identify this part of Marsden as being of high archaeological sensitivity. The principal heritage value lies in the standing buildings rather than below-ground remains. There is no evidence currently available to suggest significant archaeological deposits beneath the church footprint.

The archaeological interest of the site is therefore limited and primarily embodied within the existing built fabric.

Architectural & Artistic Interest

The architectural interest of the United Church derives from its robust stone construction, articulated arched openings, and clearly expressed roof form. The stained-glass window contributes artistic value and enhances the quality of light within the interior.

Internally, the scale and volume of the principal space, together with surviving staircases and structural elements, provide evidence of the building's original ecclesiastical function.

While not ornate, the building demonstrates confident civic composition and contributes positively to the architectural diversity of the Conservation Area.

Historic Interest

The site has accommodated religious use since at least the late 18th century. The present building reflects early 20th-century continuation of that tradition.

Its significance lies not only in architectural form but in its role as a longstanding communal focus within Marsden. The building contributes to the social narrative of the village's development during and after the industrial period described in the Appraisal.

Townscape Contribution

The church contributes to:

- The varied roofscape of the Conservation Area.
- Important streetscape views along Warehouse Hill Road.
- The rhythm of stone-built structures within the village core.
- The interplay between built form and vegetation characteristic of Marsden's valley setting.

Its removal or significant alteration would erode the character identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.



Ordnance Survey map from the National Library of Scotland, 1906.



Ordnance Survey map from the National Library of Scotland, 1908.



Ordnance Survey map from the National Library of Scotland, 1932

4.0 Heritage Impact Assessment

4.1 Design Approach

This section assesses the impact of the proposed conversion of the former Marsden United Church and part of the Sunday School into residential use.

The assessment follows the approach set out in the NPPF and Historic England guidance, considering:

- The identified significance of the buildings and Conservation Area;
- The contribution made by the site to its setting;
- The degree to which the proposals preserve or alter that significance;
- Whether any resulting harm would be less than substantial.

The analysis considers external alterations, internal interventions, and the principle of use.

4.2 Principle of Development

The church is currently vacant. Redundant ecclesiastical buildings are inherently vulnerable to deterioration where no viable use is secured. Residential conversion provides a sustainable long-term function that enables continued maintenance and stewardship of the building.

The proposed use is compatible with the building's scale and spatial qualities. It allows retention of the principal volume and defining architectural features while ensuring compliance with modern living standards.

The principle of adaptive reuse is therefore consistent with the objective of conserving heritage assets through viable occupation.

4.3 Impact on External Form, Roofscape and Silhouette

The proposals retain:

- The existing roof form;
- The established ridge height;
- The principal elevations;
- The building's overall massing and silhouette.

No extensions are proposed. The church continues to read as a substantial stone-built civic structure within the Conservation Area.

Roof Alterations

The scheme introduces a limited number of skylights within the roof slope and a balcony set within the roof space.

Importantly:

- The balcony is contained within the existing roof form.
- It does not project beyond the established envelope.
- It does not alter the ridge height or overall silhouette.
- There is no alteration to the principal front elevation.

The skylights are modest in scale and sit flush within the roof plane. Given the building's elevated position and varied roofscape context within the Conservation Area, these insertions do not materially disrupt key views or the layered skyline described in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

The overall perception of the church as a stone-built civic structure with a strong roof form remains intact.



Existing front elevation.



Proposed front elevation.

4.0 Heritage Impact Assessment

4.4 Impact on Elevations and Openings

There are no material changes to the principal front elevation.

On the east-facing elevation, limited new door openings are introduced to provide access to garden areas. These are:

- Modest in scale;
- Carefully positioned within existing structural bays;
- Subordinate to the primary architectural composition.

The dominant characteristics of the building — arched openings, stone construction, and vertical articulation — are preserved.

The Sunday School conversion similarly retains the external envelope, with no alteration to overall form or massing.

4.5 Impact on Architectural Features

The proposals retain key features identified as contributing to significance, including:

- The prominent stained-glass window;
- The arched openings;
- Stone staircases;
- The expressed roof structure.

Internal subdivision is arranged to respect the building's structural logic and principal spatial hierarchy. While subdivision inevitably alters the original ecclesiastical layout, the primary volume and key architectural elements remain legible.

The insertion of a lightweight stair and lift core is designed to sit discreetly within the existing fabric without dominating historic features.

4.6 Impact on Townscape and Conservation Area Character

The Conservation Area derives significance from:

- Its cohesive stone-built character;
- Varied but harmonious roofscape;
- Layered views shaped by topography;
- The presence of communal and civic buildings punctuating the urban grain.

The proposals:

- Do not alter the church's civic presence;
- Do not introduce extensions or competing massing;
- Do not disrupt established rooflines;
- Preserve the material consistency of the building within its context.

The limited roof insertions and discreet east elevation openings do not undermine the building's contribution to streetscape views or its role within the wider townscape.

The character and appearance of the Marsden Conservation Area are therefore preserved. There is no evidence to suggest archaeological sensitivity beyond the standing fabric, and the proposals do not involve significant ground disturbance.

Taken together, the proposals result in limited and proportionate change. External form, massing and principal architectural features are retained, and the building's contribution to the Conservation Area remains intact. Any minor harm arising from internal subdivision or discreet roof insertions would fall at the lower end of the less than substantial spectrum and is clearly outweighed by the public benefit of securing the building's long-term viable use.



Existing east elevation.



Proposed east elevation.

The East elevation, a secondary side elevation rather than the principal frontage, accommodates the majority of the proposed interventions. All alterations have been designed to minimise visual impact and preserve the building's character.

At ground floor level, three new door openings are introduced to provide access to private amenity space. At loft level, Unit 7 incorporates a balcony inset within the existing pitched roof. The balcony is fully recessed within the roof plane and is not visible from the main road, ensuring no harm to the wider townscape setting.

5.0 Conclusion

The former Marsden United Church and associated Sunday School make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Marsden Conservation Area through their stone-built form, civic presence, and long-standing communal function. The buildings reflect the layered historic development of the village and contribute to the varied roofscape, material coherence and townscape qualities identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal.

The proposed conversion retains the established external form, principal architectural features and townscape presence of the church, with intervention focused primarily on sensitive internal reconfiguration and limited, carefully integrated external alterations. The introduction of discreet rooflights, a contained balcony within the roof slope, modest east-facing door openings and a lightweight accessibility ramp do not alter the building's silhouette or materially affect its contribution to the Conservation Area. Any minor harm arising from these interventions would fall at the lower end of the less than substantial spectrum and is clearly outweighed by the public benefit of securing the building's long-term viable use and conservation. The proposals therefore preserve the character and appearance of the Marsden Conservation Area and align with national and local heritage policy.



Proposed front elevation

6.0 References

Kirklees Council (2019). Kirklees Local Plan: Strategy and Policies (Part 1). Adopted 27 February 2019.

Kirklees Council. Marsden Conservation Area Appraisal (2007)

National Planning Policy Framework (2024), Chapter 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment, paragraphs 202–214.

UK Government (1990). Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 72(1).