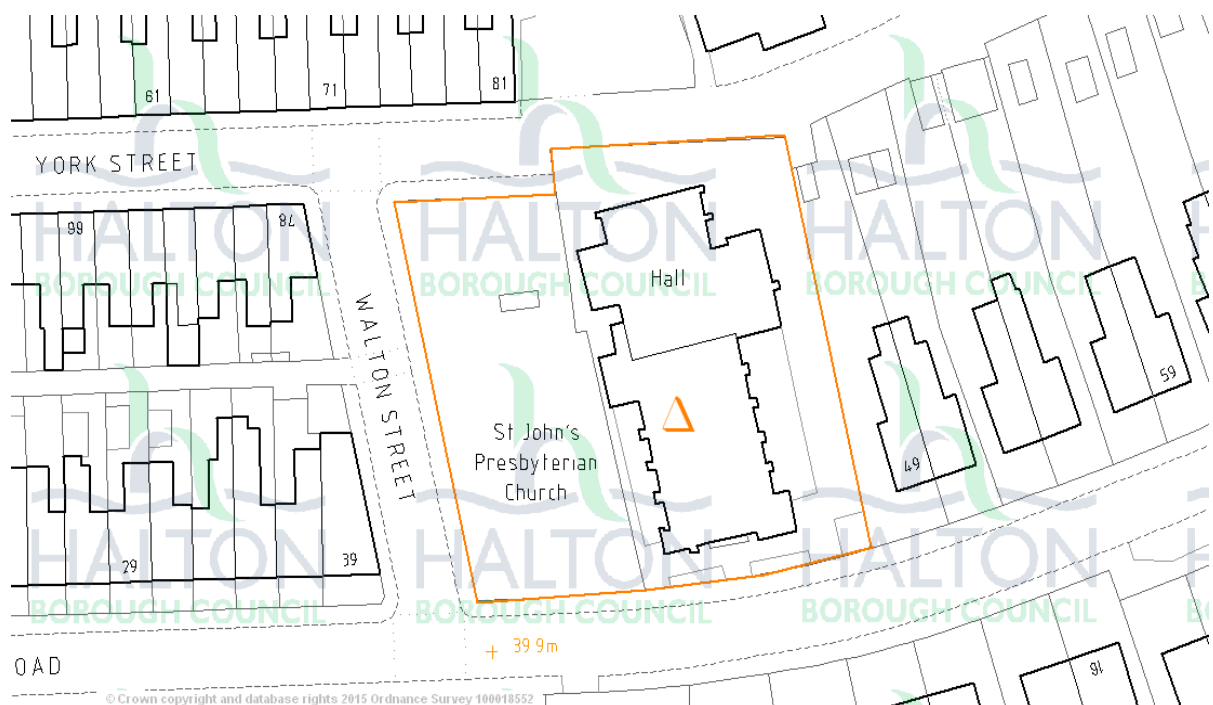


<b>APPLICATION NO:</b>	15/00194/FUL
<b>LOCATION:</b>	St John's Presbyterian Church, Victoria Road, Runcorn
<b>PROPOSAL:</b>	Proposed partial demolition and conversion of church into 6 No. town houses, construction of 2 No. detached dwellings and 6 No. semi-detached dwellings on the adjoining land with associated access, car parking and landscaping
<b>WARD:</b>	Mersey
<b>PARISH:</b>	-
<b>CASE OFFICER:</b>	Pauline Shearer
<b>AGENT(S) / APPLICANT(S):</b>	Mr P Pollard – Handford Developments
<b>DEVELOPMENT PLAN ALLOCATION:</b>	
Halton Unitary Development Plan (2005)	Primarily Residential Area
<b>DEPARTURE REPRESENTATIONS:</b>	No
	4 representations from public consultation
<b>RECOMMENDATION:</b>	Approve subject to conditions.
<b>SITE MAP</b>	



## **1. APPLICATION SITE**

### The Site and Surroundings

Site is approximately 0.25 hectares in size, has an irregular shape, but is generally rectangular. Site currently comprises St John's Presbyterian Church, its associated car park and an area of unused grass land to the side of the church. The site located in the higher Runcorn area and is accessed currently from Victoria Road to the front of the church with a rear secondary access onto York Street. The site is located within a Primarily Residential area as designated within the Halton Unitary Development Plan.

### Planning History

The following are of relevance to this application:- 08/00164/FUL – Proposed 9 mews houses (Refused); 08/00418/FUL – Proposed 9 mews houses (approved); 13/00280/FUL – Proposed demolition of church and erection of 10 dwellings (refused – appeal dismissed).

There are several other applications which have been approved which relate to works in and around the church building itself, but which are of no particular relevance to the determination of this proposal:- References 00/00543/FUL; 03/00103/FUL; 06/00246/FUL; 08/00163/FUL; 08/00451/FUL.

### Background

The site is currently occupied by a church which has not been used for some considerable time and which is in a poor, if not derelict, condition. Externally the stone work is of a fair condition with the church stain glass having been mostly removed. The land to the side and rear is in an unkempt condition consisting of vegetation, grass and concrete areas.

## **2. THE APPLICATION**

### Proposal Description

This application seeks full planning permission for the part demolition of the church to the rear and the conversion of the remainder into 6 No. dwellings, with the construction of a further 6 No. semi-detached and 2 No. detached dwellings on the land to the rear and side of the church.

The following associated works are proposed as part of this planning application:

- Formation of a one-way access to serve the properties with an access from Victoria Road, exiting onto York Street.
- Landscaping to the front and side of dwellings.
- Boundary treatments to the front, side and rear of properties.
- Works to the church building to enable it to become practically habitable.

- Construction of car parking spaces to serve the converted church building dwellings.

#### Documentation

The planning application is supported by a Design and Access Statement, Phase 1 Ground Investigation, Ecological Appraisal, Tree Report and Viability Appraisal.

### **3. POLICY CONTEXT**

#### National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 to set out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

Paragraph 196 states that the planning system is plan led. Applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per the requirements of legislation, but that the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions. Paragraph 197 states that in assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraph 14 states that this presumption in favour of sustainable development means that development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF; or specific policies within the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted.

The government has published its finalised Planning Practice Guidance (PPG, previously NPPG) to complement the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

#### Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (2005)

The site is designated as within a Primarily Residential Area in the Halton Unitary Development Plan.

The following National and Council Unitary Development Plan policies and policy documents are of particular relevance: -

#### Unitary Development Plan

- BE1 General Requirements for Development
- BE2 Quality of Design

GE21 Species Protection  
PR16 Development and Flood Risk  
TP6 Cycling Provision as part of New Development  
TP12 Car Parking  
TP17 Safe Travel for All  
H3 Provision of Recreational Greenspace

#### Halton Core Strategy (2013)

CS1 Halton's Spatial Strategy  
CS2 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development  
CS13 Affordable Housing  
CS18 High Quality Design  
CS19 Sustainable Development and Climate Change  
CS20 Natural and Historic Environment

#### Joint Waste Local Plan 2013

WM8 Waste Prevention and Resource Management  
WM9 Sustainable Waste Design and Layout for New Development

#### Relevant SPDs

Design of New Residential Development SPD is of particular relevance.

### **4. CONSULTATIONS**

HBC Highways– No Objection in principle

HBC Open Spaces – No Objection in principle

United Utilities - No objection in principle but recommend two conditions relating to the requirement for the submission of details of foul water and surface water run-off.

### **5. REPRESENTATIONS**

The proposal was advertised in the Widnes & Runcorn World and the nearest affected occupiers have been informed in writing. The Council is in receipt of four representations as a result of this consultation which are summarised as follows:-

- Seeking clarification on effect on house in the cul de sac opposite.
- Previous permission denied to demolish church, owner had said that church would not be demolished, objection to the application and request its refusal.
- Good to see this proposal includes retention of the church shell. The Council should support developers, providing the external features are retained. Better for the visual identity of the area.
- Welcome the retention of the church and its conversion.

- Impact of drive to the side of No.49 Victoria Road on the amenity of the occupiers of this property over a 24/7 period with noise, pollution, light with only a 1.8m wooden fence to separate.
- Proximity of plot 8 to the garage of No.49 Victoria Road and the impact on privacy from this property on the occupier of this property.
- The trees, shrubs and fence does not give adequate protection to occupiers of No.49 from;- privacy; car fumes and lights; children's play noise; will be used as a cut through to War Memorial Club; overlooking from the conversion and plots 7 and 8.
- Requires a 2m brick wall along boundary of church and No.49 Victoria Road similar to that proposed on York Street.
- Whatever goes ahead lives of occupiers of No.49 will never be the same again.

## **6. ASSESSMENT**

### Principle of Development

The re-development of the site for residential purposes has been established through the previous grant of planning permission for dwellings on the land adjacent and to the rear of the Church. The most recent proposal required the demolition of the church building in its entirety and as such was contrary to Policy CS20 of the Halton Core Strategy which seeks protection of locally important buildings. The decision of the Council was upheld at appeal and the appeal decision was not contested by the then applicant.

The site lies entirely within an area designated as a Primarily Residential Area in the Halton Unitary Development Plan and as this proposal incorporates the internal conversion of the majority of the church building, it is now considered to comply with CS20 as it will retain the essential character of this building and retain its architectural influence on the surrounding street scene.

### Design and Character

The proposal incorporates the conversion of the main part of the church building, with the rear single storey element demolished. The appearance of the remaining building will be retained with the main alteration being the lowering of the walls beneath the feature windows along the sides of the church, to allow for access and doorways. Feature stonework will be retained with glazed curtain wall behind. The Council's Conservation Consultant has reviewed the scheme and has agreed that the proposed conversion is acceptable as a principle and has recommended conditions to ensure that the essential character of the building is retained and maintained as follows:-

- Details of structural support for stone tracery
- Details of future management of the historic church
- Details of all new windows and doors
- Details of all boundary treatments
- Samples of all facing materials
- Samples of all landscaping materials

In addition it is considered that a condition is added to require an internal and external recording of the church and its setting prior to the start of the development on the site and the conversion of the church building so that a full historical record can be maintained.

The proposed dwellings are a modern interpretation of the mixture of mature residential properties that surround the site. In particular the use of gable ends with apex projecting roof detail to the front and rear mirror aspects of the dwellings on Victoria Road and the verticality of the windows on the front elevations which take reference from the church building itself. It is considered that this shows an innovative approach which, together with the church building conversion, creates a distinctive sense of place. Materials will be the subject of a planning condition and will reflect those of the church and surrounding area.

Sufficient consideration has been given to the use of boundary treatments within the scheme and in areas which are publically visible, a high quality boundary is proposed, e.g. low wall and railings to the front of the church; brick wall to the rear of plots 7 and 8 and side of plots 2 and 6. In relation to the long boundary between the access and No.49 Victoria Road the applicant has agreed to upgrade this to incorporate a brick wall/acoustic fence infill to address potential disturbance to the occupier of that property. It is considered that this fairly addresses the concerns that this occupier has raised through the consultation process in relation to the potential disturbance from noise; fumes; and light. The boundary treatment will also provide a high quality finish within the scheme which enhances the character of the area and the living conditions of the future occupiers.

A landscaping scheme has been provided which shows an acceptable level of planting which will serve to augment the quality of the scheme. Its implementation will be the subject of a planning condition.

The nearest affected residential occupiers are those of No's. 39 and 49 Victoria Road; 78 Walton Road; 71-81(odds) Walton Road. No's. 39 Victoria Road and No's.75 - 81 York Street, have side windows serving habitable rooms which face the development. However the proposed scheme has taken full account of this and the proposed dwellings meet the Council's separation guidance. No.49 also has a habitable room window which is 16m from the converted church. In this case the Council's separation distance of 21m between habitable room windows is not met. However, the church windows are offset slightly and views impeded by the stone architectural detail of the church windows. In addition the applicant has agreed to the internal fitting of full height Venetian style shutters which will, if designed appropriately, minimise the impact on the privacy of the occupier of No.49 adjacent. When assessing the weight to be attached to this interface deficiency, members should also consider the overall gain from the scheme which sees a building of local architectural value being retained. It is considered that on balance, that in terms of the impact of the scheme on the privacy of existing occupiers, that sufficient design considerations have been made to mitigate the impact on the existing surrounding occupiers, given the constraints of the proposal and that the solutions proposed are acceptable.

### Highways, Parking and Servicing

The proposal provides sufficient car parking within the site at two spaces per dwellings and is based on an internal access road which runs one way from Victoria Road to York Street. This is considered to facilitate the proposal and will not result in any serious harm to highway safety. There are visibility splay requirements which can be dealt with through planning condition for plots 2 and 13 and a control on the height of front boundary heights and the removal of permitted development rights for the conversion of garages. Recommended conditions relate to;- adequate surface water drainage details; demarcation of parking bays; control over visibility splays; removal of pd for garage conversions; construction management plans including wheel cleansing.

The proposal in this regard complies with Policies BE1 and TP17 of the Halton Unitary Development Plan.

### Ecology

The application submission includes an Ecological Appraisal. This report is based on Phase 1 Habitat Survey and bat survey undertaken in February 2015.

The Council's Open Spaces Officer has confirmed that the recommendations contained within the submitted ERAP Ltd Ecological Survey and Assessment are acceptable, however no plan is submitted showing the installation/location of the bird and bat ecological enhancements so it is not clear if the developer intends to adopt the recommendations. Additional surveying for bats will be required (recommendation 5.1.1 of Ecological Survey and Assessment as a minimum) and this, together with details of bird and bat enhancements, will be the subject of planning condition.

The proposal complies with Policies BE1 and GE27 of the Halton Unitary Development Plan in this regard.

## **7. Assessment of Viability**

It is the Council's usual requirement of proposals for residential development, that they provide both affordable housing and, where no on-site open space is provided, a financial contribution towards off-site provision in the locality. In particular circumstances, developers feel that the scheme cannot meet these requirements, then an assessment is submitted with the application to explain the viability of the scheme and provide justification for the Council to consider waiving these contributions.

In this case the developer has submitted a case to justify the waiving of both the requirement to provide affordable housing on site or payment in lieu, and for the payment of a financial contribution towards off-site public open space. The principal reason for making this claim is that the cost of the refurbishment and conversion of the St John's Presbyterian church building will prohibit and feasible financial return from the development that would allow the further cost of financial or other contributions to the Council.

The Council's Property Services team has evaluated their submission in this regard and has agreed that they provide an accurate reading of the marketability of the proposed scheme and the costs involved in the church conversion.

Based on the Council's reasons for refusing the previous application to demolish the church, it is the Council's preference for its retention and integration into a comprehensive scheme to re-use the site as a whole for residential development. Members are directed to attach greater weight to the retention of the church building, as a desirable architectural historical asset in this community, rather than to the policy requirements for additional contributions which could make the scheme undeliverable. As such, members should view the viability appraisal and its assessment in this context and support the recommendation to approve the proposal minus the contributions to affordable housing and off-site open space. In this regard, the proposal has met the terms of Core Strategy Policies CS15 and CS20 and Policy H3 of the Halton UDP as the justification of viability and is acceptable.

## **8. Conclusions**

The proposed development has taken the opportunity to utilise a locally important building, considered to offer a good quality of development suited to the character of the site and the wider area, and contributes favourably to the Borough's housing provision. The proposed works are considered to accord with Government's policy objectives and the requirements and that the aspirations of UDP and Core Strategy policy and the Design of New Residential Development SPD are met.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Approve subject to conditions relating to the following:

1. Standard 3 year permission (BE1)
2. Condition specifying plans and amended/additional plans (BE1)
3. Historical recording of the existing building internal and externally prior to commencement (BE1 and CS20)
4. Materials condition, requiring building and hard surfacing materials to match the existing building/ hard surfacing or in accordance with details submitted to and agreed in writing (BE2)
5. Submission and agreement of details of structural support for stone tracery (CS20)
6. Submission and agreement of details of all new windows and doors to be used in the conversion of the church (CS20)
7. Details of a Management Plan for the future maintenance and preservation of the historic church and features retained as part of this approval (CS20)
8. Details of boundary treatments to be submitted (BE22 and CS20)
9. Submission and agreement of a Construction Environmental Management Plan including wheel cleansing facilities (BE1)
10. Submission of details of surface water drainage scheme (BE1)
11. Submission of details of foul drainage scheme (BE1)



12. Construction and delivery hours to be adhered to throughout the course of the development. (BE1)
13. Vehicle access, parking, servicing etc to be constructed prior to occupation of properties/ commencement of use. (BE1)
14. Submission of details of bird and bat enhancements within the scheme (GE27)
15. Landscaping scheme to be approved in writing and implemented (BE1)
16. Prior to development beginning submission of details of further bat survey to be undertaken April to October (GE27)
17. Demarcation of parking bays (TP17)
18. Installation and retention of internally fitted venetian blinds (BE1)
19. Permitted development removed for extensions and outbuildings (BE2 and CS20)
20. Permitted development removed for conversion of garages (TP12)
21. Permitted development removed for front boundaries (TP17)
22. Provision and retention of visibility splays on plots 2 and 13 and front boundaries (TP17).

## **10. SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT**

As required by:

- Paragraph 186 – 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework;
- The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment No.2) Order 2012; and
- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2012.

This statement confirms that the local planning authority has worked proactively with the applicant to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of Halton.