
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 April 2025

by **Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/T4210/D/25/3360638

Church House, 254 Whalley Road, Shuttleworth, Ramsbottom BL0 0EH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Dominic Apenteng against the decision of Bury Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 71319.
 - The development proposed is retention of installed flue on north elevation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal relates to the former St. John in the Wilderness Church, which is a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). Planning permissions¹ were granted in 2021 and 2022 for the change of use and conversion of the church into a single dwelling. The works to convert the building have commenced.
3. The development subject of this appeal is an external flue and it was completed in September 2024. As the flue was present at the time of my visit and it corresponds to the submitted plans, I have determined the appeal on the basis that planning permission is sought to retain the development that has been implemented.

Main Issue

4. Therefore, the main issue is the effect of the external flue on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset and the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The former St. John in the Wilderness Church building dates from the early to mid 19th century. It was originally designed and used as a school but it was subsequently altered and enlarged and converted into a church in 1848. It is a simple rectangular building constructed in coursed stone with a gabled blue slate roof. Of particular relevance to the appeal, its northern gable end features a stone bell-cote, lancet windows with stone trefoil heads, quatrefoil medallions depicting the Evangelists (now eroded) and stone buttresses to the corners. Notwithstanding the alterations, most notably to the eastern elevation and the roof, the early English style church architecture remains legible.

¹ Refs 66744 and 67711

6. The NDHA is set in a large churchyard enclosed by stone walls. It was constructed as part of the development of Shuttleworth and remained in community use for some 170 years, initially as a school and occasional preaching station and then a church until falling out of use around 2017. It forms part of a historic group with the nearby graveyard and Sunday School. Given the above, I find that the special interest of the NDHA, insofar as it relates to the appeal, to be primarily associated with its architectural features which contribute to its historic legibility and special interest as a simple country church at the heart of the village.
7. The stainless steel flue punctures the north gable end wall to exit the building between the windows. It rises vertically between the medallions before angling across the elevation to protrude upwards from the edge of the roof. As such, it does not obscure the windows, medallions or bell-cote. Irrespective, its modern materials, design and siting are poorly related to and out of keeping with the traditional materials and architectural features of the historic elevation.
8. I accept that the fresh metal appearance may tarnish over time to a duller finish, similar to a former metal flue in the eastern roof slope. However, the photographs illustrate that this was itself an incongruous feature, despite apparently being considerably smaller in scale than the appeal flue and exiting through the roof rather than snaking up through the architectural details of the gable end elevation. Even if the flue did achieve a more muted metal finish, it would remain a discordant and jarring feature. Neither the former metal flue nor historic stone chimney in the eastern roof slope provide a justification for the scheme.
9. The NDHA is set back from and elevated above Whalley Road. At times of year when the frontage trees are in leaf, the views of the building will be filtered. Nevertheless, at the time of my visit I was able to observe the flue from locations to the front even with scaffolding to the north elevation. When the trees are not in leaf, and once the scaffolding is removed, the flue would be more conspicuous in the short range views from Whalley Road. Irrespective, vegetation is temporary and it should not be relied upon to screen development from view.
10. The northern elevation and flue are in any case readily visible along Church Road, due to the prominent siting of the NDHA close to the rear boundary. The approved alterations to the east elevation including roof dormer, such as were necessary to facilitate the residential conversion, have resulted in the domestication of that elevation. However, the orientation of the building, the change in ground levels and the boundary wall serve to screen and mitigate the visual impact in views from the rear. In this regard, the rooflights are relatively flush features and the dormer is modest and unassuming when seen in profile in juxtaposition with the north gable end. In contrast, the flue is a prominent and visually obtrusive feature that is not sympathetic to the otherwise historic elevation.
11. The flue is not assimilated into its surroundings, taking into account the visual context comprises the neighbouring traditional stone dwellings and the undeveloped rolling countryside that surrounds the settlement. As such, the modern flue is a discordant and conspicuous feature that does not contribute positively to sense of place or local distinctiveness.
12. Given the above, I find that the flue detracts from the historic and architectural interest and thereby erodes the significance of the heritage asset. It also harms the traditional rural character and appearance of the area. The National Planning

Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that, in weighing applications that affect a NDHA, a balanced judgement is required having regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the asset. In this case, the appellant considers that the flue results in less than substantial harm to the NDHA and I am in agreement with the parties in that the flue diminishes the significance of the heritage asset.

13. The flue would serve a fireplace in the ground floor study. I understand that the fireplace would be located directly under the central steel of the mezzanine, which prohibits a vertical alignment through the roof. Moreover, an external central flue would obscure the bell-cote. However, there is little evidence that a flue could not be routed internally to avoid the mezzanine supports, that a stove could not be sited elsewhere so that the flue could exit through the roof, or more fundamentally that there are no alternative means of heating the room.
14. No substantive details of the heating system of the converted building have been provided. I accept it would be an attractive feature such as are commonplace in dwellings, but it has not been demonstrated that a solid fuel fire in the study is essential to the residential conversion. I acknowledge the appellant's financial investment and commitment to creating a family home. However, planning permission has already been granted for the conversion and residential use of the building and the works appear to be well advanced. There is little compelling evidence that the building would not be a viable dwelling without a fireplace in the study. The fireplace, and hence the flue, would be a private benefit. In the absence of any substantiated public benefits, on balance this is not sufficient to outweigh the harm to the significance of the heritage asset.
15. Therefore, I conclude that the development does not conserve or enhance the significance of the former St. John in the Wilderness Church NDHA and it harms the character and appearance of the area. It conflicts with Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan 2022 to 2039 Adopted 21 March 2024 and saved policy EN1/2 of the Bury Unitary Development Plan Adopted August 1997. These require, among other things, that development conserves and enhances the historic environment, contributing to the significance of heritage assets and sense of place, and avoiding adverse effects on the character of the area. It would also conflict with the heritage protection and design aims of the Framework.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the development conflicts with the development plan and there are no material considerations to outweigh that conflict.
17. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR