

Heritage Statement
for
Proposed Internal Refurbishment Works
at
Former URC Church
Besses o' th' Barn
Whitefield, Bury
M45 7EL



Listed Building Consent Application Submission: Proposed Works

Building: Former URC Church, Besses O' The Barn, Whitefield, Bury, M45 7EL

Listing: Grade II

Architect: Alfred Waterhouse

Applicant: Manchester Chinese Christian Church

Introduction

The former URC Church at Besses O' The Barn is a Grade II listed building of architectural and historic interest, designed by Alfred Waterhouse. It was completed in 1865 as Besses Congregational Church, providing seating for around 800 people, and including a schoolhouse for 500-600 children. The building has recently been acquired by the Manchester Chinese Christian Church, who are not subject to ecclesiastical exemption.

Whilst under the ownership of the URC, various interventions have taken place. The interior layout remains much as originally designed, but with unsympathetic finishes and fitting throughout, and a heating system which is both not suitable for a building of this size, and has reached the end of its life.

The decline in attendance of the church in recent years, and therefore income, has meant that few fabric improvements have been made. Fortunately, the roof is in generally good condition, so the continued use of the building is feasible.

The church wishes to undertake essential improvements and repairs to ensure the building remains in sustainable use, addressing both the structural fabric and the functional requirements of a modern congregation. These works are intended to be carried out with sensitivity to the historic and architectural significance of the building.

Proposals

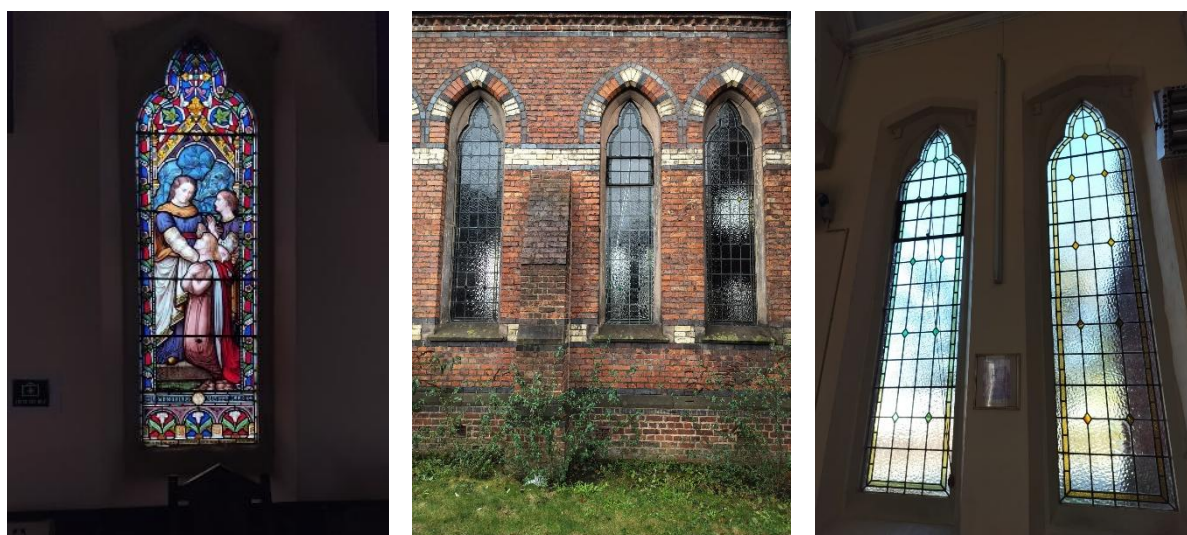
Secondary Glazing

The existing stained glass windows to the main worship space are single glazed. Glazing is the fabric element through which is least insulating. In order to reduce heat loss, and to ensure that the proposed heating system (see below) is kept to an appropriate scale, it is proposed that secondary glazing is installed to the internal face of the windows.

The proposed secondary glazing will be of Perspex within a slimline aluminium frame. This will be mechanically fixed within the window reveal

This will have no effect on the external face of the building, as it is purely an internal intervention. As natural light comes through the windows, the colours and leading of the existing stained glass will still be visible, and minimal impact will be had on the experience of the space.

The secondary glazing will be removable, and therefore not have a permanent effect on the historic fabric of the building.



Left: decorative stained glass window within the transept; Centre: single glazed window to main worship space, from Barn Street; Right: Single glazed window seen internally.

Insulation

The ceiling of the main worship space is a significant proportion of the thermal envelope. As a vaulted roof, insulation must be placed in the void between the existing ceiling and the roof. This space is ventilated, so it is important that this is not compromised, as this could lead to damp issues.

Following investigation into the roof space, it is proposed that a first layer 100mm thickness mineral wool insulation will be laid on top of the existing plaster vaulted ceiling between the ceiling joists. A second 100mm layer will be cross-laid over the top to eliminate thermal bridging across the joists. top layer insulation will be retreat from the eaves slightly further to maintain a continuous, unobstructed ventilation path. There is sufficient space to accommodate this and maintain a suitable ventilation gap.

This will greatly improve the thermal performance of the space, and reduce the load on the proposed heating system, leading to a more sustainable running cost, both environmentally, and financially.

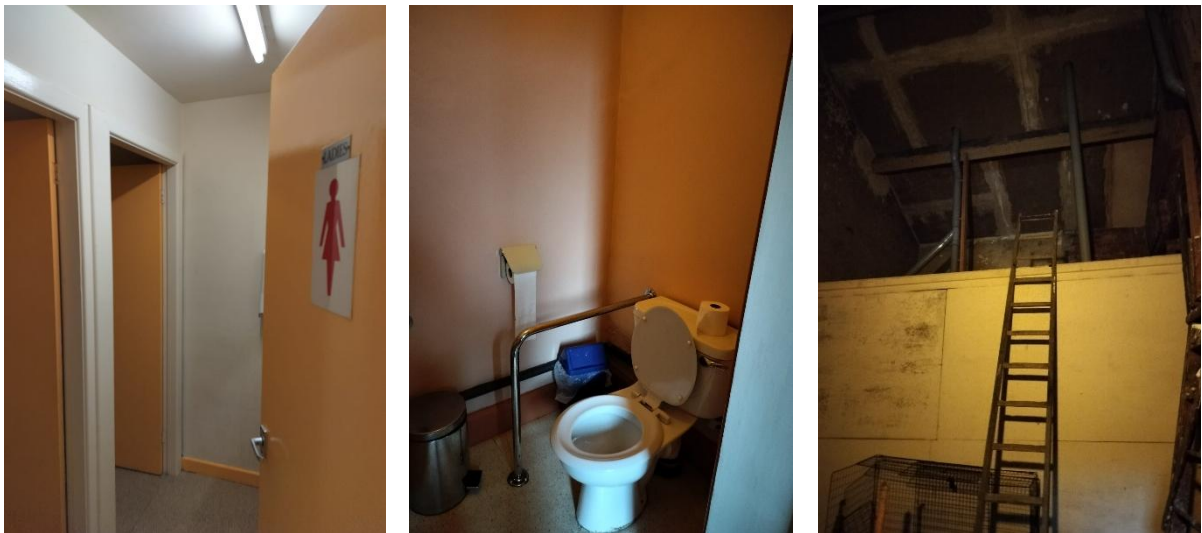


Left: roof space above nave in main worship space; Right; roof space above transept. Sufficient space for mineral wool insulation to be laid and ventilation to be maintained.

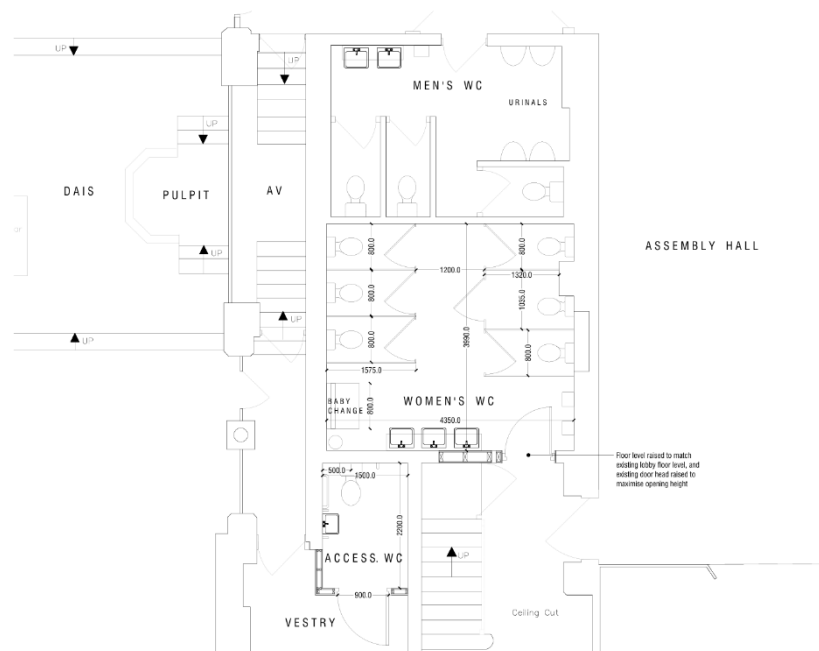
WCs

The existing WC provision is not sufficient for the number of people who are attending the church, and the toilets are outdated, and in need of refreshing. The proposed works reorder the existing provision to create an improved Men's WC, and a currently redundant space is proposed to be used to form a Women's WC. The size and scale of the WCs will be more appropriate for building users and make the most of the existing space without being cramped.

The existing accessible WC will be extended and improved to meet current regulations through the use of the former vestry. This alteration will also provide another alternative fire escape / circulation route for the congregation. The vestry is not of significant heritage value, but it is proposed that fittings such as cupboards, doors, and plasterwork are retained.



Left: Dated WCs; Centre: existing accessible WC is not compliant with current regulations; Right: redundant space to form new WCs



Above: Proposed WC layout

Balustrades

The guarding to the galleries in the main worship space are much lower than recommended. It is proposed that brass handrails are added to the timber guarding to raise the height. This sympathetic detail will ensure that the balconies are safe for use by the congregation or staff.



Left: existing low timber balustrade from the balcony, seating has been removed; Centre: Proposed styling of brass handrail to existing timber balustrade; Right: balcony from the main worship space.

M&E

The heating system is to be refreshed throughout. New gas boilers will be installed to the basement. The use of air source heat pumps has been explored, but due to the nature of the existing building, a higher temperature is required than can be provided by a heat pump system.

In the assembly room and ancillary spaces, a radiator system will be used, with traditional panel radiators. It will be assessed as to whether there is any possibility to reuse existing pipework. All new plumbing will be sensitively routed to minimise the damage to historic fabric.



Above: Existing radiators are too few and ineffective for the space.

In the worship space, it is proposed that traditional panel radiators will be used around the perimeter of the room. These modern units will provide sufficient heat output, without significantly impacting the historic appearance of the room. In addition, destratification fans will be used at high level to ensure that the heat is distributed to the height of the congregation. It has been proposed that some hydronic blow heaters may be required to meet the heating levels, but this will be assessed and reviewed as the system design progresses.

Rewiring works will take place throughout the building to ensure that it can remain in safe, contemporary use. These will be concealed to not disturb the historic interiors.

The existing light fittings are proposed to be replaced with LED fittings. This will reduce the energy use of the building, and ensure there is sufficient lighting to all areas. In combination with the above rewiring, the safety of the electric circuits will be significantly improved.

Finishes

Where wall and ceiling redecoration is proposed, heritage colours are to be used, and traditional materials are to be specified where appropriate.

Flooring refurbishments will retain historic fabric, but bring areas with modern finishes up to contemporary standards.

The fixtures and fittings to the Kitchen are understood to not be original. They will be updated for functional contemporary use, whilst the fabric of the room will be retained.

Reasoning

These works have been proposed with the intention that original fabric will be retained wherever possible. The subdivision or alteration of existing spaces has been minimised, to retain the atmosphere and environment of this important heritage building. New proposals, such as the Women's WCs, have been located within redundant space to ensure there is no stripping of existing finishes.

To accord with the age of the building, minimal visual impact is proposed for all new elements. It is not necessary to 'copy' historic features, but items such as the balustrades have been chosen to reflect the visual language of the building.

Where upgrades are proposed to the fixtures and fittings, new items are to significantly improve energy efficiency, accessibility, and safety. Along with the aesthetic considerations, each item has been assessed to ensure that long-term sustainability is ensured, without compromising architectural integrity.

Sustainability

The building is generally considered to be watertight, but some leaks occur at windows, and occasionally through the roof, although it is understood that these are currently fixed. The main fabric concerns are through insufficient heating. This can lead to mould growth on internal walls, along with an unwelcoming atmosphere which would reduce the use of the building.

Improvements to the boiler will ensure that the system works more efficiently, reducing the fossil fuel use of the church whilst also improving the experience of using the building. The proposed installation of insulation will also reduce the heat loss through the existing fabric.

These solutions are necessary to ensure that the existing building can be maintained in contemporary use.

Planning History

Pre-application advice was sought on 23rd February 2026 from Mark Kilby at Bury Council. This has been used as the basis for this application, and the Council's response has informed all decisions taken.

There are no other planning applications on record.

Conclusion

The proposed works are essential for the long-term use and sustainability of the church. They have been designed to balance modern functional requirements with the protection and preservation of the building's Grade II listed features. Guidance from the Conservation Officer will ensure all interventions meet recognised heritage standards.

Please read this document and application alongside the submitted drawings.