

REPORT TO THE SOUTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	04 th July 2013
Application Number	13/00005/FUL
Site Address	St Francis Church, Beatrice Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 3PN
Proposal	Extension to church
Applicant / Agent	Saunders Architects / St Francis Church
Town/Parish Council	Salisbury City Council
Grid Ref	E. 414361 N. 131484
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Charlie Bruce-White

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

Cllr Douglas has called in the application on the grounds of community support for the proposal and differing views over the proposal's visual impact.

1. Purpose of report

To consider the above application and the recommendation of the Area Development Manager that planning permission be **REFUSED** for the reasons detailed below.

2. Report summary

The main issues in the consideration of this application are as follows:

1. Principle of development;
2. Impact upon character of listed building.

3. Site Description

The site relates to St Francis Church, a prominent modern red brick building on the corner of Castle Road and Beatrice Road, approximately mid-way between Old Sarum and Salisbury city centre. The church is set back from both roads and is also raised above them, and is by far the largest building in the area. The church is grade II listed. Behind the church exists a separate but associated building, known as the church hall, used as a pre-school, youth centre and as a meeting place for a variety of community groups.

4. Relevant Planning History

None relevant

5. Proposal

It is proposed to erect a single storey extension on the south side of the church, fronting onto Beatrice Road. The extension would predominantly include meeting rooms, but would also include a vestry, quiet room and would provide alternative means of entrance into the church. Due to the church being on an elevated level, the extension would include a ramp for wheelchair access. Materials to the extension would comprise brickwork to match the existing church.

6. Planning Policy

Local Plan: policies G1, G2, D3, CN3

Central government planning policy: NPPF

7. Consultations

City Council	None received
Conservation Officer	Object due to impact upon character of listed building

8. Publicity

The application was advertised by site/press notice and neighbour consultation.

No letters of representation were received.

9. Planning Considerations

9.1 Principle of development

Local plan policy PS3 states that the development of places of worship and community facilities will be permitted within or adjoining the settlements. Local Plan policy CN3 provides criteria on alterations to listed buildings, and requires that:

- (i) new work respects the character of the existing building in terms of scale, design and materials;
- (ii) sympathetic natural materials, matching the original, are used in repair or replacement work;
- (iii) the historic form and structural integrity of the building is retained; and
- (iv) architectural or historic features, including internal features, are retained unaltered.

9.2 Impact upon listed building

The Conservation Officer comments that:

The church of St Francis, Castle Road, is a prominently located church built in 1938 by nationally important architect Robert Potter, and is a grade II listed building. It is

one of only a handful of twentieth century buildings in Wiltshire to be listed. The Ecclesiastical Exemption applies so listed building consent is not required, it being replaced by the faculty system of the Church of England.

We gave detailed advice at the pre-application stage, informed by comments from the Twentieth Century Society, one of the national amenity societies that are designated statutory consultees. There is no dispute whether the church requires more space, however it remains unclear why the extension should be located on the southern side rather than the more discreet north. There may be a cost impact of such relocation, in that there would be a level of excavation required, however national policy on the alteration of listed buildings requires that any harm to their character must be justified by public benefit and reduced to the absolute minimum.

National policy in the NPPF states that “Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use”. PPS5 Practice Guide further states that “Harmful development may sometimes be justified in the interests of realising the optimum viable use of an asset, notwithstanding the loss of significance caused, provided that the harm is minimized”.

The existing building is very little altered, as one would expect for a significant twentieth century building worthy of listing, and the proposal is for a large single-storeyed extension on its most prominent elevation. The setting of the building within its site, respecting the building line of Beatrice Road, is very important to its character; the extension would effectively remove the grassy bankside that gives the building space and a sense of balance. Similarly, the plan of the building is one of near-absolute symmetry, with a narrow single-storey structure wrapping around the base in the form of a plinth: the proposed extension would adversely affect the proportions of this relationship.

The application documentation refers to the setting of the church:

‘on both [Castle St and Beatrice Rd] the residential properties are set back from the road behind front gardens, continuing the building lines established by the church on these elevations’.

‘The church is set in its own grounds and is built on a platform...there are extensive lawns at the west frontage which sweep around the south west corner to the steps up to the south porch...and provide an important simple green landscape setting for the church itself’.

The importance of the building line, especially as the church has itself defined where other buildings were to be constructed, is high. Building forward of this line disrupts an intentional landscape setting that forms part of the original design for the site and its historic significance. The submission itself identifies the importance, and it is therefore clear that this is not the least harmful option for the building. The argument that the extension needs to be visible is not explained to a level that could override the consideration of the impact on the listed building.

I therefore stand by my earlier advice that the proposal should be reconsidered so that the principal aims of the church and community are still met while minimising the harm to the listed building.

The applicant explains that the idea for the extension arose when the church began to be utilised for additional functions following fire damage to the adjacent church hall. Many of the community groups that normally used the church hall were accommodated within the church during this period. Whilst the church hall repairs and refurbishment works have now been complete, following positive feedback from the new users, the applicant would like to encourage the continued new found use of the church, particularly by smaller secular and community groups, for which smaller and more flexible space is desirable. It should be noted that the repair and refurbishment works to the church hall were deliberately designed with this objective in mind, i.e. that the church would continue to accommodate a proportion of the displaced groups. Consequently the repaired church hall includes less accommodation than it did before the fire, with the most badly damaged part of the hall now being used as an outdoor play area rather than having its roof rebuilt and accommodating additional meeting space.

The applicant also explains that the extension would provide a more open facade to the church compared with the existing south facade which, with its absence of windows, gives the appearance of shutting the Church away from the community. It is hoped by the applicant that the new extension would provide a better 'shop front' to the church, which in turn would encourage further use of the building. In addition, the new access arrangement would be an improvement for both wheelchair and non-wheelchair users.

Whilst Officers recognise the benefits cited by the applicant, it is not considered that the weight to be afforded to them is sufficient to outweigh the harm to the listed building as identified by the Conservation Officer and Twentieth Century Society. The reason for this is because the applicant has not demonstrated that an extension on the northern side of the building is not feasible or viable. Whilst the applicant has detailed drawbacks to extending on the northern side of the church, including the need for greater excavation works, poorer light and less visibility to the passing public, no evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that such issues would make the project unfeasible. Officers also consider that the majority of the drawbacks to extending on the northern side could probably be readily overcome, such as through innovative design and more effective signage/publicity. Whilst there may be greater cost implications to building on the northern side, no details on costings have been submitted by applicant or information on how this would affect the project's viability.

Consequently, whilst the prospect of a less harmful alternative exists, Officers do not consider that the proposal meets planning objectives with regards to the protection of listed buildings.

10. Conclusion

The proposed extension to the south side of the church would significantly harm the character of the listed building, and it is not considered that the public benefits arising from the proposal outweigh this harm when more acceptable alternatives are available.

11. Recommendation

Permission REFUSED for the following reason:

The church of St Francis is a prominently located church built in 1938 by nationally important architect Robert Potter, and is a grade II listed building, one of only a handful of twentieth century buildings in Wiltshire to be listed. The existing building is very little altered and the proposal is for a large single-storeyed extension on its most prominent elevation. The setting of the building within its site, respecting the building line of Beatrice Road, is very important to its character. The extension would effectively remove the grassy bankside that gives the building space and a sense of balance, to the detriment of its character. Similarly important is the plan of the building which is of near-absolute symmetry, with a narrow single-storey structure wrapping around the base in the form of a plinth, and the proposed extension would adversely affect the proportions of this relationship. It is not considered that the weight to be afforded to the public benefits of the proposal are sufficient to outweigh the identified harm to the character of listed building, particularly when less harmful alternatives for extension have not been demonstrated by the applicant as unfeasible or unviable. Consequently the proposal would be contrary to Local Plan policy CN3 (as saved within the adopted South Wiltshire Core Strategy) and guidance contained within the NPPF (chapter 12).