

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/02372/FP

Date: 29/01/2025

Planning Officer: AH

Address: St Marys Church, Churchyard, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1HP

Subject: Installation of replacement North wall and boiler house roof following demolition of existing.

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 It is considered that the proposal would neither harm the listed building's special character or harm the special character of the Hitchin Conservation Area, therefore satisfies the provisions of Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990 and will accord with Section 16 of the Framework and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031. The proposal is therefore **UNOBJECTIONABLE** in heritage terms.

2.0 Context

- 2.1 St Marys Church, Churchyard, Hitchin is grade I listed and is located within the Hitchin Conservation Area. Both the building and area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework. The brevity of the statutory list entry is noted:

Medieval parish church dating from C12 but largely C14 and C15. Nave, chancel, aisles, west steeple, south and north porches. Interior retains carved woodwork of C14 and C15, fine tombs and wall monuments. RCHM on 117-119.

All listed buildings in Churchyard form a group.

3.0 The Local Plan and NPPF (Dec 2024)

- 3.1 Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 is relevant. Since commenting under Rule 4.5 (see 4.1 below), the NPPF has been amended and the following paragraphs are now relevant:
- **135 c)** *(sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment),*
 - **207** *(local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)*
 - **210** *(desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),*
 - **212** *(great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),*
 - **213** *(clear and convincing justification), and*
 - **215** *(harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).*

4.0 Background

- 4.1 On 24 May 2024 under 24/01147/NHC I commented on a proposal to rebuild the existing plant room on the north side of the tower under Rule 4.5 [Rule 4.6

for CBC consultation] of the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 as amended. I provide my response to this separately.

4.2 The Combined Design, Access Statement and Heritage Statement states (my emphasis in bold):

*The loss or alteration of historic fabric, is a matter relating to listed building legislation and in this instance is being considered under the faculty application to the Diocese of St Albans. Nevertheless we record here that the construction of the boiler house dates from the first half of the 20th century and therefore by virtue of its age is much less significant than other parts of the fabric of this medieval building. As many of the element of the wall will be re-used when it is rebuilt. This proposal will not therefore have a negative impact on the significance of the church as a heritage asset on account of loss of important fabric. The appearance of the wall will be as existing. It will therefore not impact that significance in visual terms, affect key views or views within the churchyard. **Currently the existing flues are visible above the parapet from the northwest path within the churchyard. However, they do not have a large impact on the view of the Church from that direction. The flues of the new boilers will be smaller and will therefore have less impact. When a heat pump is installed, it should be possible to dispense with them completely.** Accordingly the visual appearance of the proposal will not have a detrimental effect on the significance of the heritage asset. For these reasons the proposal will accord with policies SP9, SP13 and HE1.*

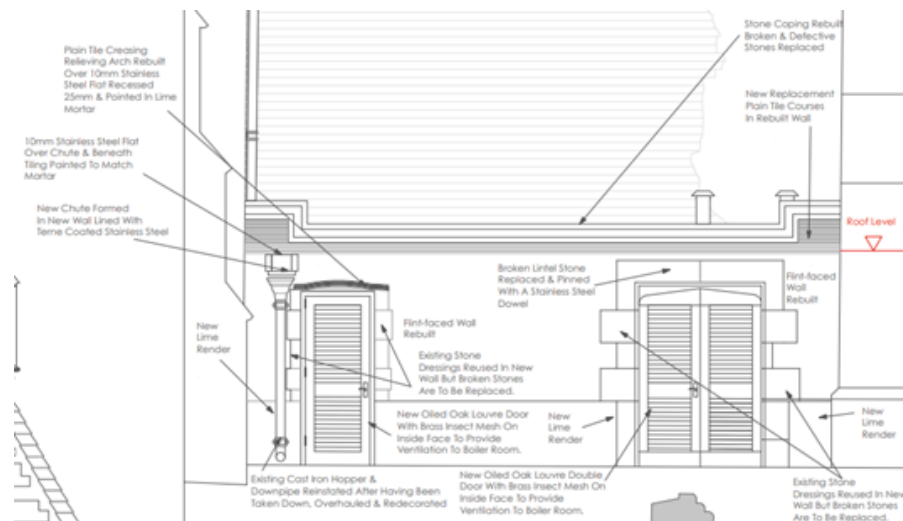
4.3 Under the faculty process I said:

Whilst I raise no objection in heritage terms to what would essentially be a like-for-like replacement externally, is there scope to improve upon the existing arrangement by omitting the stepped parapet and increasing the height of the central section so that there is a single height parapet to screen any new flue projecting from the new boiler room roof?

This matter does not appear to have been addressed in the current submission, but I have received a voicemail from Michael Beare on 23 January stating that the chrome flues will go so will not be seen. In my opinion, there is insufficient reason to pursue this matter.

5.0 The Proposal

5.1 Drawing no. 2204/50-P Rev A is very well detailed (see extract below).



5.2 Under the subheading 'Design' in the Combined Design, Access Statement and Heritage Statement it states:

- *The asphalt-covered concrete roof will be rebuilt and will be replaced with a timber roof covered in asphalt.*
- *In the medium terms the two new condensing boilers will be removed and be replaced by a ground source heat pump.*
- *The existing wall is in disrepair, but it might not be necessary to demolish the entire north wall.*
- *The wall will need to be at least taken down to a level that enables the steel beam to be removed.*
- *It is proposed to reuse as many of the coping stones as possible.*
- *The wall below the steel beam is faced with rubble stone and has a render plinth which is attached to a brick substrate, which is bedded in cement mortar.*
- *The lintel stones will be reused but one over the double-doors is cracked. It will be repaired or replaced to match depending on its condition.*
- *The doors will be replaced with new oak doors with integral oak louvres and will be oiled and will darken with age.*
- *A chute will be reformed in the wall in the current location and the cast iron hopper and downpipe that it discharges too will be overhauled and reinstated.*

6.0 Suggested conditions

1. Standard time condition.
2. Following the removal of the section of wall above the steel beam and inspection of the wall below this, and before any further works are undertaken, written confirmation shall be given to the Local Planning Authority as to whether the remaining section of wall is to be repaired or rebuilt.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade I listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

3. In the event that the wall is to be rebuilt, the existing carstone and flints shall be reused in the new build. Where lintel stones or other dressing stones are incapable of repair and are proposed to be replaced, these shall match the existing stones as closely as possible in colour, texture and detailing.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade I listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer