

REMODELLING AND REFURBISHMENT OF BALDOCK METHODIST CHURCH

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT



JUNE 2026

REMODELLING AND REFURBISHMENT OF BALDOCK METHODIST CHURCH

This Design and Access Statement is submitted in support of Planning and Listed Building Consent applications for the sensitive internal remodelling and refurbishment of the former Baldock Methodist Church.

The church is a Grade II listed building within the Baldock Conservation Area. The proposals seek to modernise the building's facilities to better serve its continued function as a place of worship for the local community of Baldock.

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1.1 Benefits of the Proposal

Baldock Baptist Church purchased the redundant Grade II Listed Baldock Methodist Church in 2025 and propose to remodel and refurbish the church to provide suitable permanent accommodation for their needs. It is planned to increase the internal floor area by inserting a wall to wall first floor to enhance the building’s functionality, accessibility, and regulatory compliance. Some associated external works are also proposed.

Demolition Works

The proposed works involve the demolition of the 1982/83 internal interventions including:

- All internal partitions
- Staircase
- Front raised platform area
- Kitchen
- WCs
- Part first floor

The Henry Speechly pipe organ was installed in the church at the same time as the 1982/83 alterations to the building (replacing a larger, older instrument) and is to be removed and offered for re-homing through “Pipe up for Pipe Organs”
- A British charity established in 2022 seeking to sustainably re-home unwanted British pipe organs. *(Fig. 01)*

The principal fabric of the Grade II listed building will be mostly undisturbed, and the original features and materials are to be preserved and partly refurbished.

The decorative leaded glass panes, currently located behind the raised platform at the front of the church are thought to have originated from a glazed screen separating the entrance vestibule from the body of the church (removed during the 1982/83 works). These are to be retained and incorporated into the new first floor vestibule. *(Fig. 02)*



Fig. 01 : The Henry Speechly pipe organ



Fig. 02 : Decorative leaded glass panes

Internal Works

The remodelling works will include provision of:

- Insertion of a wall to wall first floor
- A large, dedicated place of worship on the new first floor
- New stair and platform lift access to first floor
- A spacious entrance foyer
- An accessible WC and baby change
- Adequate toilet facilities
- A kitchen
- A small hall
- Two small classrooms, one of which is to double as a vestry and meeting room
- Upgrades to the fire strategy, accessibility, lighting and acoustics

High level roof light windows will be inserted within the roof above the first floor level. These will be strategically aligned with the existing side windows to create a bright and attractive environment for the church's main worship sanctuary.

External Works

The proposed external alterations are minimal in scope. They have been designed to avoid any material impact on the building's architectural character or its contribution to the wider conservation area. They include:

- A first floor fire escape door with metal emergency exit stair to the rear
- Creation of level access by removal of steps
- Improvements to the front yard area including the resurfacing of existing pathways and a modest increase in the paved area immediately in front of the church building - necessary to prevent overcrowding outside the church before and after main worship services
- Removal of the yew tree (*Fig. 03*) as this is presently having a harmful impact on the appreciation of the church's principal elevation and also to enable the proposed modest increase in the paved area in front of the church
- Installation of a new church signboard
- Upgraded lighting



Fig. 03 : Yew tree in front of the principal front elevation of the church

Essential repairs and restoration works to the church's facade were undertaken in April - June 2026 by Bridgeman Construction Limited. These works are considered to be 'like-for-like' repairs and hence Listed Building Consent is not sought for these.

Services

The mechanical and electrical services are to be renewed to suit the remodelled building and to significantly enhance efficiency and hence reduce carbon emissions, including:

- Heating
- Ventilation
- Power
- Lighting

The proposed works aim to viably and sustainably secure the following benefits:

- Securing the Listed Building's continued use as a church
- Enhancing its functionality for both worship and wider community activities
- Enhancing visibility and appreciation of some of the heritage features of the building
- Improving accessibility and inclusivity
- Eliminating the risk of under use or vacancy or potential conversion to residential or other alternative uses

Further details follow in this statement which seeks to explain the design choices and how the benefits are achieved. It also addresses matters raised during the pre-application engagement with the Conservation Officer. It provides clarification and justification for the proposed works in relation to the building's significance, setting, and continued use.

Additionally, further context and heritage information can be found in the submitted Heritage Statement.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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2.1 Project

This Design and Access Statement (in addition to a separate Heritage Statement and a Statement of Need) is submitted in support of Planning and Listed Building Consent applications for the sensitive internal remodelling and refurbishment of the former Baldock Methodist Church. The church is a Grade II listed building within the Baldock Conservation Area. The proposals seek to modernise the building's facilities to better serve its continued function as a place of worship for the local community of Baldock. The aim is to secure its long-term use as a sustainable place of worship with benefits for the local community.

2.2 Location

Site Address : 15 Whitehorse Street, Baldock, Hertfordshire, SG7 6QB. *(Fig. 04)*

2.3 Applicant

Trustees of Baldock Baptist Church

2.4 Brief Description of Proposals

The following works are proposed:

- Remove the entirety of the 1982/83 structure including all rooms and the staircase which presently occupies the front third portion of the church. Removal of the pipe organ
- Construction of a first floor throughout the entirety of the building. All of the first floor would be the worship sanctuary, except for a small landing area where the staircase and platform lift terminate.
- Insertion of roof light windows to provide additional daylight and the option of passive ventilation to the worship sanctuary
- Partition the ground floor to provide an entrance foyer, a small multi-use hall, two classrooms (with the ability to double as vestries), a modest kitchen facility and WC provision
- Installation of an external steel fire escape staircase at the rear of the church for emergency exit purposes only
- Enhancements to the front curtilage, comprising the extension and resurfacing of the hard-standing, removal of a tree, reduction of existing mature trees, installation of a new church sign and the restoration of the boundary railings and gates



Fig. 04 : Site Location : Aerial view of Baldock

3.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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3.1 Significance of the Building

The building has architectural, historic, and communal significance which derives from its external form and composition as a nineteenth-century Methodist chapel. It retains its original function and architectural character as a local landmark. **(Fig. 05)** The pair of prominent turrets and main large window on the front elevation are a recognised feature on Baldock High Street. **(Fig. 06)**

Internal prominent characteristics of the church can be seen in **(Fig. 07)**, the vaulted ceiling, ornate decorative ceiling roses, and ornate roof structure supported by slim cylindrical steel columns in a regular grid formation create the open worship space with a sense of grandeur. It also has pointed arched windows and door openings which are a key feature of its Victorian Gothic architectural style.

The church potentially has communal value through active use as a place of worship, and a contribution to the social and cultural life of Baldock.

Its significance was affected by late twentieth-century alterations. The 1982/83 scheme, especially the addition of the part first floor, have reduced the coherence and legibility of the original internal layout. The original plan and architectural intent of the building cannot be fully appreciated due to these alterations.

(See section 9 for details of the heritage significance)



Fig. 05 : Prominent landmark of Baldock, on right-hand side. Photograph taken in 1925



Fig. 06 : Front elevation on Whitehorse Street



Fig. 07 : Internal view of the vaulted ceiling and original decorative features

4.0 STATEMENT OF NEED

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4.1 The needs of Baldock Baptist Church

A detailed Statement of Need has been prepared and is submitted separately. This discusses the broader contextual needs of Baldock Baptist Church and why Baldock Methodist Church is the best, most suitable option to provide for the long term accommodation needs of Baldock Baptist Church. Aspects of the Statement of Need relating to the design proposals for Baldock Methodist Church are included below:

For Baldock Methodist Church to provide a high quality, fit for purpose environment to satisfy the needs of Baldock Baptist Church, it will be essential to carry out complete internal remodelling of the church building to create an environment which is capable of providing for the varied and busy schedule of services and other activities (including children's activities) that the church provides to its local community – with the principal aims guiding the design being developing maximum flexibility of space and optimising the building so that every part is accessible to all users, including those with disabilities.

The main essential requirements to satisfy the needs of Baldock Baptist Church are:

- A main worship sanctuary all on one level with a minimum seating capacity of 170 persons, providing uninterrupted viewing of the raised platform area and baptistry at the front. This should be a pleasant and attractive space for the church's main services with adequate daylight to avoid the need for excessive artificial lighting
- A generous sized entrance foyer which can also serve as a waiting area
- A small multi-use hall with a minimum seating capacity of 60 persons in rows
- Several smaller rooms which can be used as classrooms for Sunday School and also double as vestries for church officers
- Normal conveniences including a modest kitchen facility and WC provision, including an accessible WC
- Extension of the front curtilage hard-standing to avoid overcrowding situations in front of the church before and after main worship services
- The building configuration must enable safeguarding principles to be adhered to for the church's children's work
- Step free access must be provided to every part of the building, for those who require this
- There is a strong desire to protect and enhance the remaining historic fabric and special character of BMC, for the interest and enjoyment of the building's users

The main identified hindrances within BMC which would need to be overcome to achieve the requirements above are:

- The solid internal wall from floor to roof height, which has split the building into two parts, with only very minimal linkage between
- The very large, central window on the front elevation which is presently blocked from the main worship sanctuary and only provides light to the first floor meeting room
- The lack of step free access to the current first floor area
- The present ill proportioned, poorly naturally lit and unattractive worship sanctuary, with a seating capacity of only around 100 persons
- The present lack of ancillary floorspace for use as teaching spaces for Sunday School work and other smaller meetings
- Given the significant degree of harm caused to the historic fabric and special character of BMC by the 1982/83 scheme, the principal point of historical interest now lies in the very large and impressive biaxial timber roof trusses. At present, the roof structure is under appreciated due to the ill proportioned and poorly lit worship sanctuary

It is emphasised that the existing internal configuration and condition of BMC is unable to provide for the essential requirements of Baldock Baptist Church, and unless permission is granted for the proposed works, the church will at some point be most likely to dispose of the property and seek an alternative.

The proposal addresses the need to secure the building's long-term, practical and sustainable use as a church and as a community facility. Currently the layout, level of accessibility, and building services do not meet modern standards and would not meet the needs of Baldock Baptist Church.

There has been no repair program or significant maintenance undertaken on the building since the 1982/83 scheme. As a result, elements of the building fabric and services have deteriorated over time. This has led to decline in performance, reduced energy efficiency, and an increased risk of further defects. The lack of ongoing investment has led to the building's limited functionality and its inability to meet current standards for accessibility, safety, and comfort.

The church currently has a constrained internal layout, and the later alterations have reduced the clarity and functionality of the space. There is limited provision for accessible facilities, including a lack of suitable WC accommodation and step-free access to all areas including the first floor areas, which restricts inclusive use and limits the building's ability to serve the wider community.

The building also requires upgrades to its services and fabric, including heating, insulation, and electrical systems, to improve energy efficiency, reduce running costs, and comply with the current Building Regulations. Without such interventions, the ongoing use and maintenance of the building could be reduced.

The proposed works seek to address these issues in a coordinated and sensitive manner. They will improve accessibility, functionality, and environmental performance, while also respecting and preserving the building's architectural and historic character.

Ministry and Community

In its current configuration, the building would not adequately support the operational, functional and safeguarding needs of Baldock Baptist Church. It would not suit the intended worship and teaching activities of the church. The aim of the proposed internal remodelling is to provide a coherent, flexible and inclusive layout.

Accessibility

The current only means of access to the first floor is a single staircase, which prevents all disabled access to these first floor rooms. The escape route to the rear of the building is compromised with a step up to the raised platform area, so the main entrance door is the only step free exit. There is a disabled WC facility, but this requires modernisation and there is a lack of baby change facilities. The front entrance double doors are currently wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and buggies; therefore, these doors will remain but require refurbishing. *(Fig's. 08 & 09 show the existing internal layouts)*

Externally, the access pathways provide a challenge in terms of accessibility. The pathways have uneven and deteriorated tarmac surfaces. To the rear of the building, there is a step up to the two rear access doors. *(Refer to Architect's drawings, 006 - 010, for existing plans, elevations and sections)*

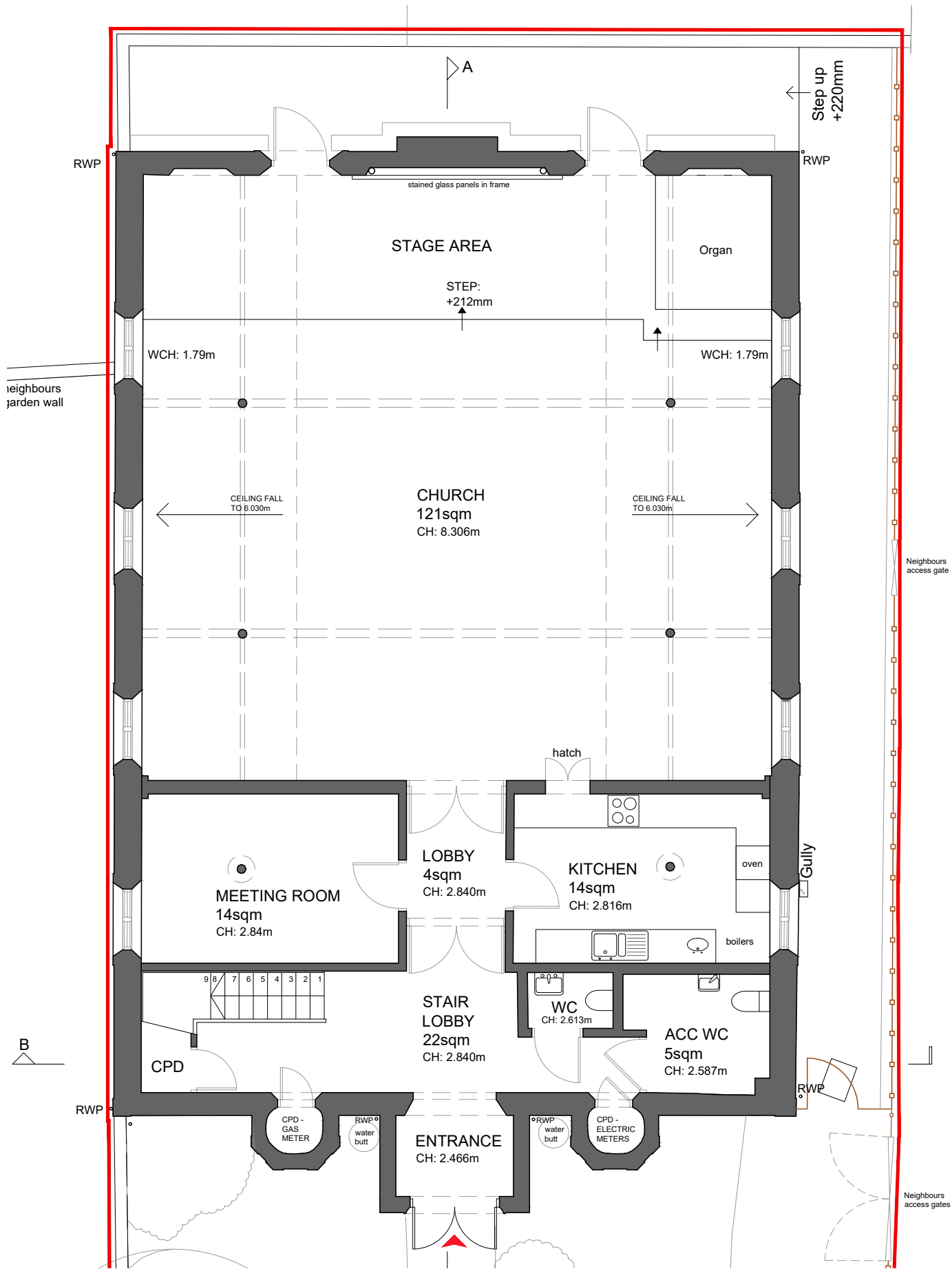


Fig. 08 : Existing Ground Floor Layout

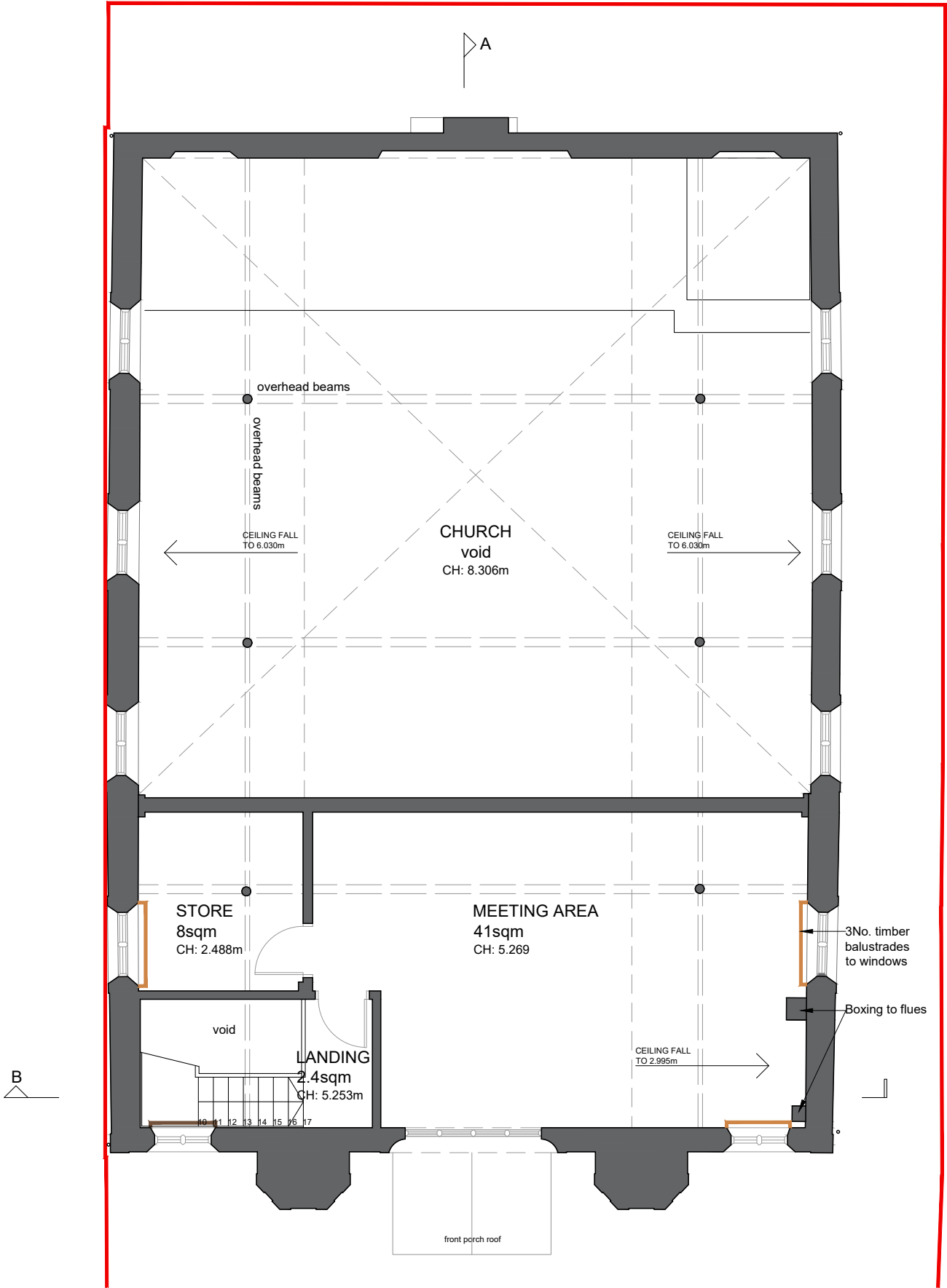


Fig. 09 : Existing First Floor Layout

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF SITE AND SETTING

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5.1 Physical Context

The Grade II Listed Methodist church is situated within the Baldock Conservation Area. It was built in the nineteenth century, and its design was influenced by the Gothic style. The building is set back from Whitehorse Street behind a modest enclosed forecourt allowing clear views of the façade, albeit somewhat obscured by trees. Its primary construction is red brick with painted reconstituted stone/concrete dressings. Its design includes a symmetrical frontage including two octagonal turrets with small cupolas. Pointed-arch Gothic inspired side window openings and a large central traceried window reinforce its ecclesiastical character. Overall, its design makes for a significant feature in Whitehorse Street and within the Baldock Conservation Area.

Internally, the building retains a recognisable ecclesiastical form centered on a principal worship space with ancillary accommodation. Features of interest include ornate roof trusses, decorative leaded glass panes, thought to have originated from a glazed screen separating the entrance vestibule from the main body of the church, and elements of historic timber joinery. However, the interior has been significantly altered.

The church was listed on 15 August 1974, having been recognised for its architectural quality and its contribution to a group of historic buildings along Whitehorse Street.

Major reordering in 1982/83, following the loss of the church hall, introduced a first floor within the front third of the building. This area is subdivided to provide meeting areas, toilets and a kitchen. A full height wall separates this section from the main worship space, disrupting spatial relationships, reducing natural light, and weakening the connection between the front elevation and interior. The introduction of this wall means that it is no longer possible to appreciate the full length and proportion of the space. The wall cuts through the ornate roof structure. *(Fig. 10)*

While the original structure, windows and ornate Victorian style trusses internally remain of architectural importance, these late twentieth-century alterations have reduced the clarity of the interior.

The building makes a positive contribution both as an individual listed structure and as part of the wider historic townscape. Its setting, including the forecourt and boundary



Fig. 10 : Internal view of the 1982-3 addition of the full height wall

relationship with Whitehorse Street, forms an important part of its significance and must be considered in any proposed works.

The proposals involve comprehensive internal remodelling to create a flexible, accessible layout, including a wall to wall first floor, reconfigured circulation, step-free access, and improved facilities. External changes are minimal and would not affect the building's character or its role in the conservation area.

Overall, the proposals are considered to result in less than substantial harm and deliver public benefits, including securing the building's optimum viable use, improving accessibility, enhancing functionality, and reducing the risk of vacancy.

5.2 Planning History

It is understood that Baldock Methodist Church held its final service on 9 June 2024, having served continuously as a place of worship and as an important focal point for the local community for approximately 170 years, since 1853. Prior to its closure, the following planning history is noted, (excluding general enquiries and works to trees):

1. **80/01863/1** - Erection of single storey rear extension. **CP 31.12.1980**
2. **82/00475/1LB** - Application for Listed Building Consent to demolish rear hall and classroom and internal alterations to main building. **CP 20.09.1982**
3. **86/01932/1** - Section 53 determination - Use of hall for nursery school for 20 children between 9am and 12 noon every weekday. **RQD 26.11.1986**
4. **03/00112/1LB** - Listed Building works. **Accepted**
5. **17/00835/1LB** - Reconfiguration of existing toilets to form disabled persons WC and baby changing facilities. **WNPW (withdrawn not proceeded with)**

4.3 Addressing the points raised in the pre-application

Pre-application advice was issued on 2nd March 2026 by Mark Simmons - Senior Conservation Officer at North Hertfordshire District Council.

The scheme has been revised and informed by the pre-application advice received. Each point raised has been considered in relation to the building's significance, functionality, and the need to secure its viable long-term use.

Some of the concerns noted have been dealt with by alterations/clarifications to the proposals:

The first floor vestibule's positioning relative to the right hand reveal of the gable end window

The proposed vestibule has been slightly reduced in size to enable a larger stand-off between this and the right hand reveal of the gable end window.

Concerns around visually heavy balustrade treatment

Drawings have been updated to show indicative frameless glass balustrades over all first floor windows on the side elevations.

Rooflights - Size and Position

Eight new roof lights have been proposed to provide natural daylight to the proposed worship space on the first floor where existing daylight is limited. This reduces reliance on artificial lighting and mechanical ventilation, adds much needed daylight and will enhance the new worship space. *(Fig. 11)*

Their number, scale and positioning have been carefully considered in light of the pre-application advice received, to ensure they are discreet to the external roof silhouette. They are set out in a regular, restrained arrangement, aligned with the width, scale and positioning of the existing side window openings and are designed to avoid interruption of key rooflines when viewed from public vantage points.

The approach ensures that roof alterations are minimal and visually restrained.

However, some of the concerns noted cannot be overcome without fundamentally compromising the proposal's ability to meet the needs of Baldock Baptist Church, as detailed in the Statement of Need. Therefore, it is understood it will be necessary to provide robust justification for these elements of the proposal, in order to satisfy the tests contained in paragraphs 213 and 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework:

Paragraph 213 *“Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification”*

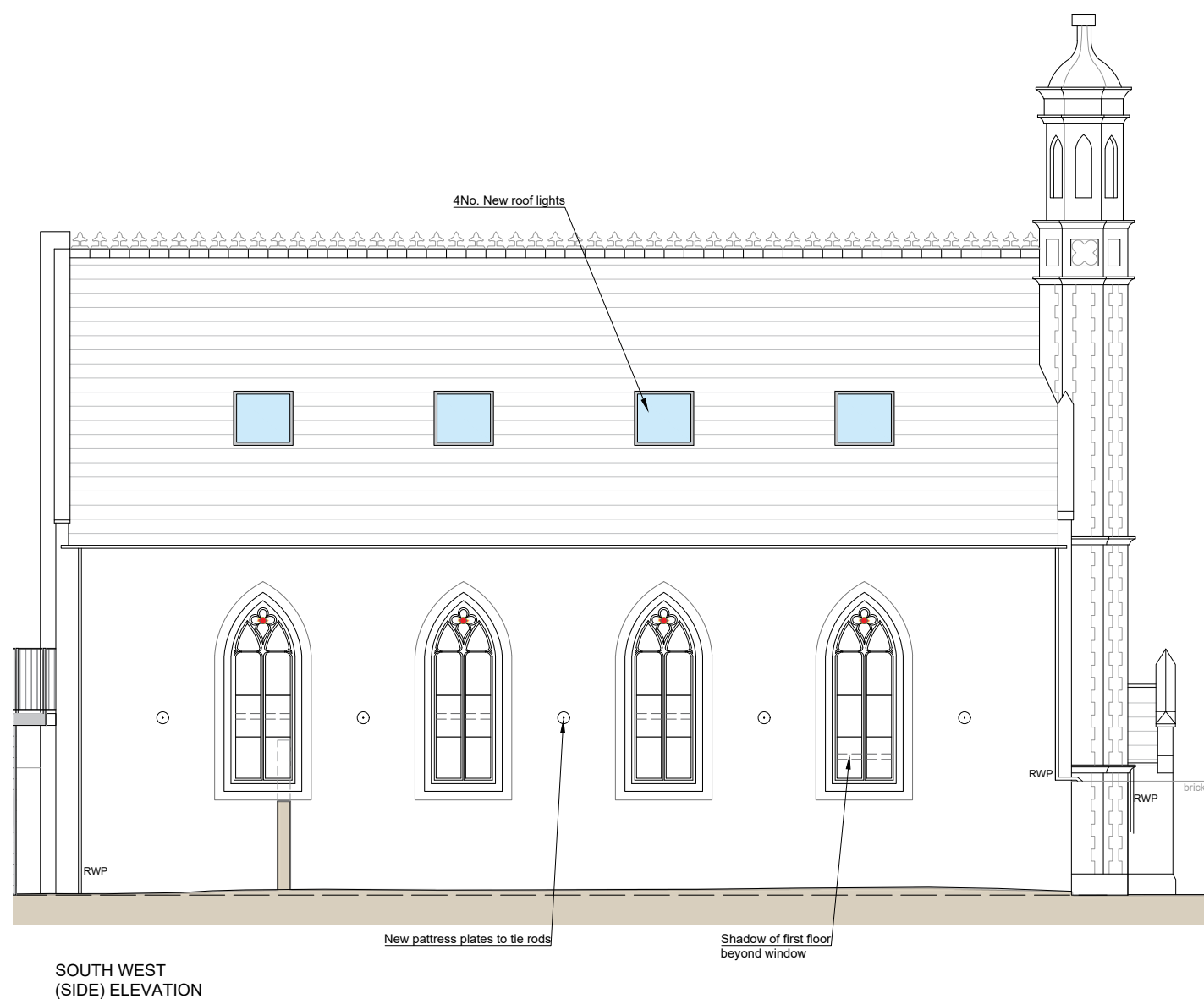


Fig. 11 : Proposed roof lights on the side elevations

Paragraph 215 “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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use”

The main issues in this respect are:

The essential need for an external first floor fire exit and external fire escape staircase

The proposed external fire escape staircase and associated external fire exit are required to provide safe and compliant emergency egress from the first floor accommodation. The external solution represents the only viable option for achieving a safe evacuation route in a way which wouldn't render the configurations of the first floor and ground floor inadequate and unable to provide for the main essential needs of Baldock Baptist Church, as set out in the Statement of Need. The alternative option – to provide an internal enclosed fire escape staircase – would result in the loss of a Sunday School classroom on the ground floor as well as causing significant harm to the front view of the worship sanctuary by virtue of the presence of a substantial “box” feature. The church's Sunday School currently consists of five separate classes. In addition, a group for adults runs concurrently. The presently proposed configuration of the ground floor would provide two classrooms plus teaching spaces for a further three classes in the hall (shown on the ground floor indicative furniture layout). It is acknowledged even this configuration is tight for the church's needs and the loss of one of the classrooms would mean the building would be inadequate for the church's needs.

Therefore, an external first floor fire exit and external fire escape staircase are an essential part of the proposal.

Careful consideration has been given to its siting, scale, and design, with the intention of ensuring it is as lightweight and recessive as possible. The intervention has been located to the rear to minimise impact on principal elevations and key architectural features, and is designed to read as a clearly subordinate addition. (Fig. 12)

Its design minimises its visual and physical impact on the host building. Interference with

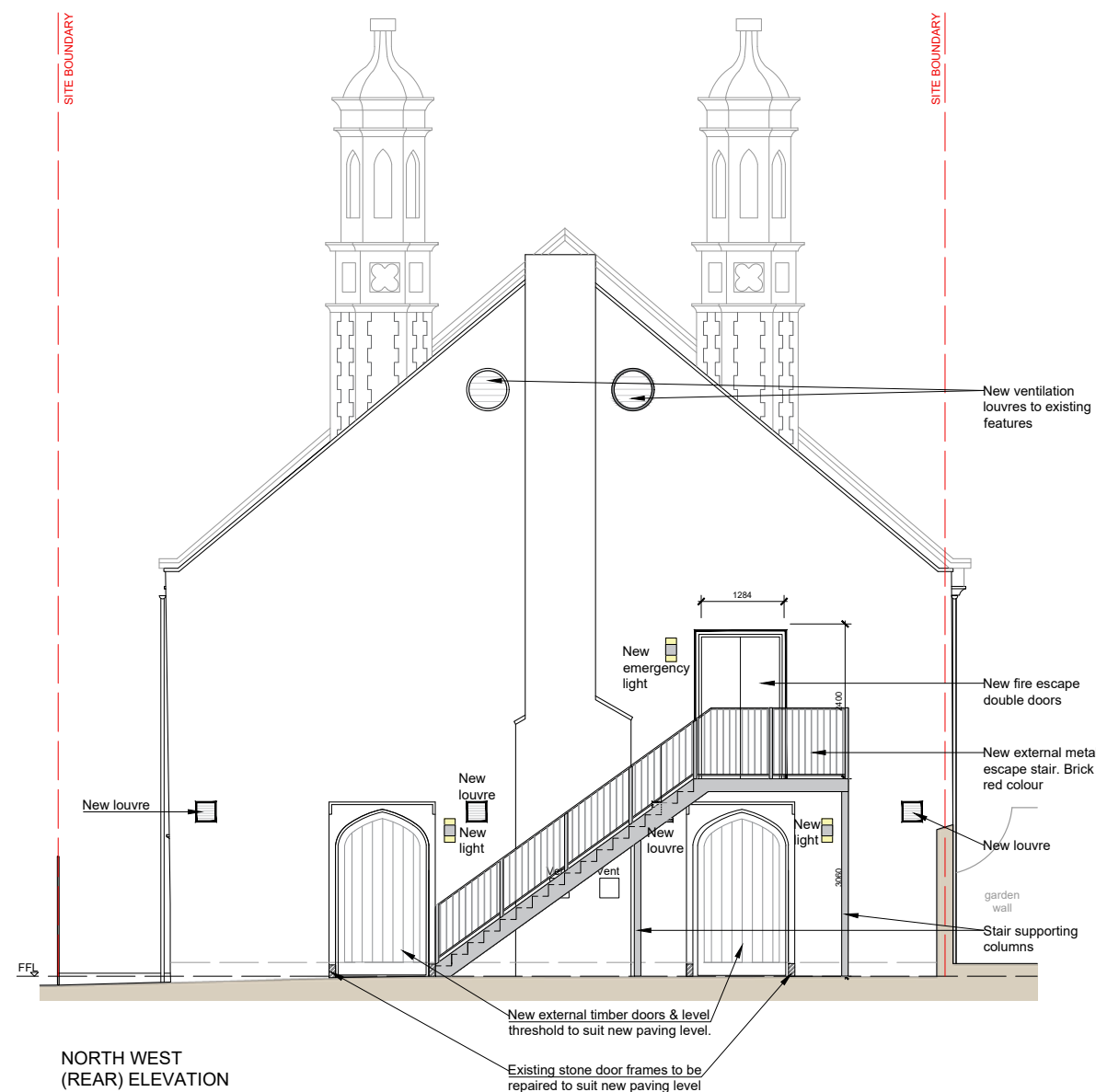


Fig. 12 : Proposed external escape stair at rear of building

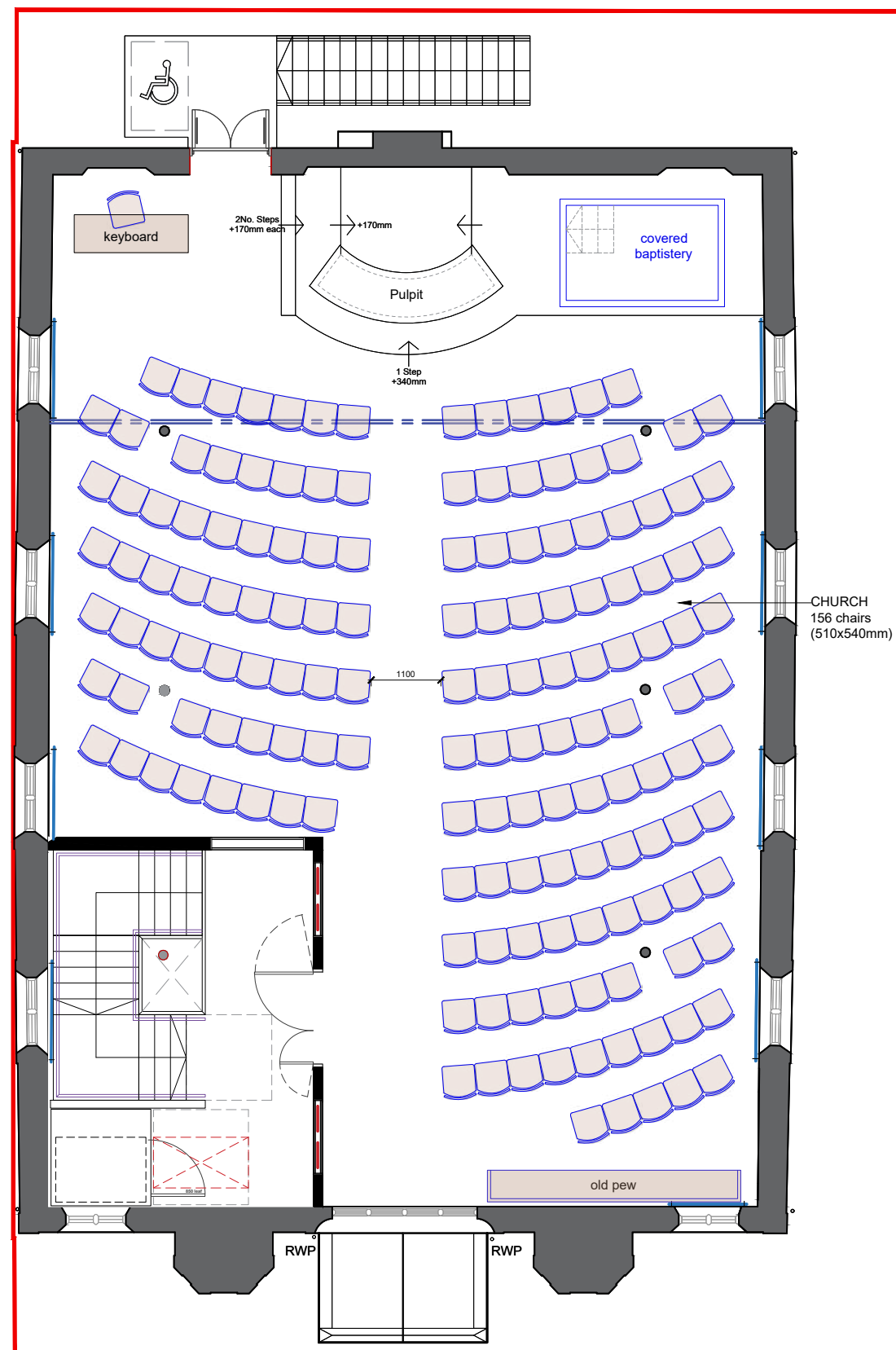


Fig. 13 : Proposed seating for the worship sanctuary of up to 170 people

principal and significant architectural features elevations is avoided and is conceived as a lightweight, recessive intervention. While it inevitably introduces a degree of change to the building's external appearance, this is considered to result in less than substantial harm which is necessary to facilitate safe continued use.

Overall, while there is a degree of harm associated with introducing this new external structure and new door opening in the wall, this is considered to be limited and necessary to enable the continued and safe use of the building. The stair will be designed to have minimal intervention and to "lightly touch and penetrate" the existing fabric of the listed building. The external door side and metal escape stair will be proposed in a red brick colour to blend in with the surrounding wall colour.

It will be for the sole purpose of providing an escape route and hence will only be used by the occupants as such. This should allay any concerns regarding overlooking or noise in relation to neighbouring properties on Aldridge Court.

The essential need for the first floor worship sanctuary to be wall to wall

There is an essential need for the first floor worship sanctuary to be wall to wall - this is necessary to:

- A.** To provide a worship sanctuary capable of seating 170 persons, as set out in the Statement of Need and;
- B.** To prevent noise interference between the ground floor and the first floor

In terms of **point A**; the requirement for the worship sanctuary to be capable of seating 170 persons has been derived in part by the church's present congregation of around 110 persons but with strong anticipated growth in numbers due to the presence of many young families and newcomers; and in part by the church's occasional hosting of special meetings (principally weddings, baptisms and funerals) which all attract significant numbers of visitors in addition to the regular congregation. **(Fig. 13)**

The indicative seating layout for a wall to wall first floor sanctuary shows this arrangement would be capable of satisfactorily accommodating 156 chairs (chairs are of a modest proportion at around 500mm width) with a historic pew at the rear capable

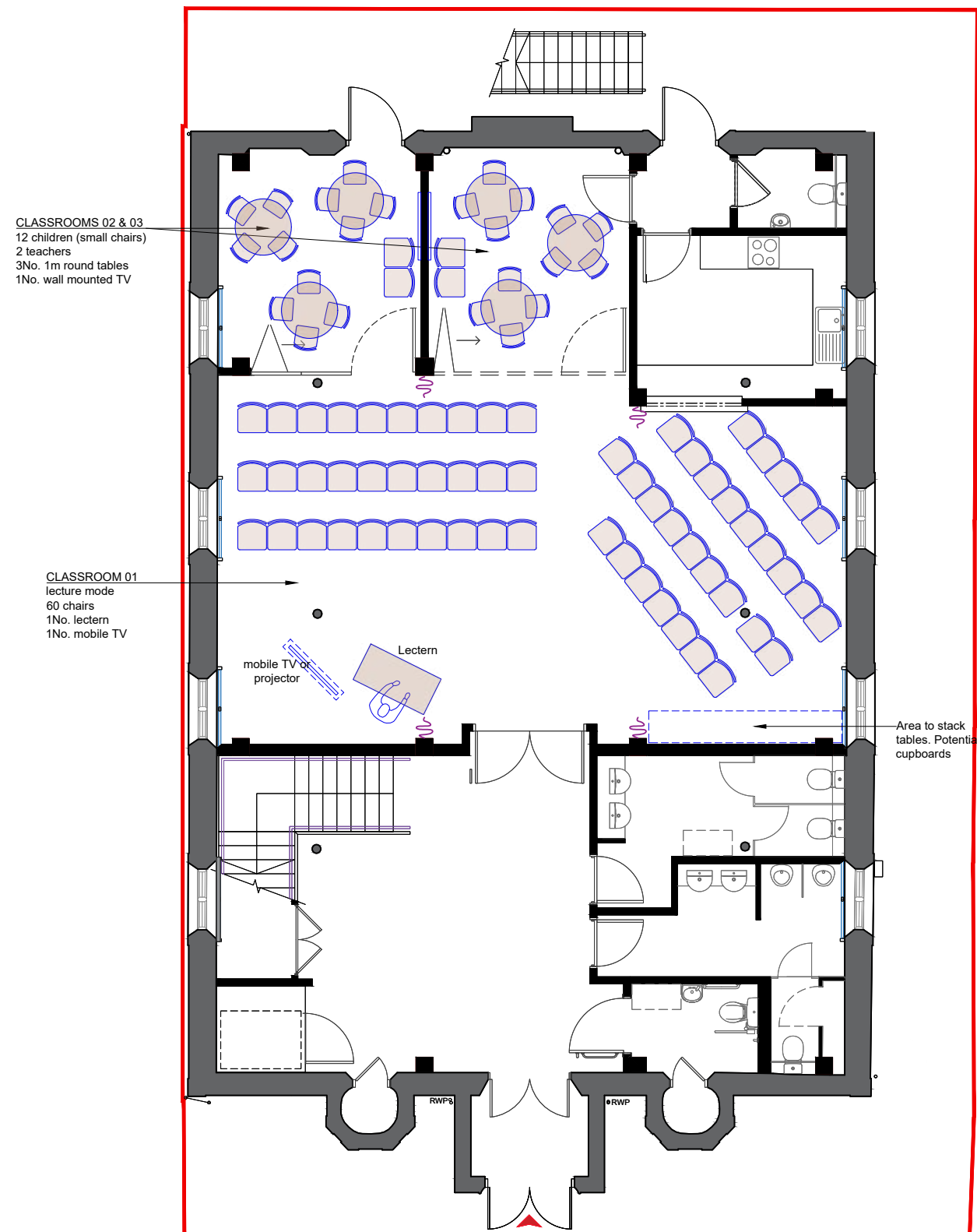


Fig. 14 : Ground floor furniture indicating dual use as Sunday School teaching space

of accommodating an additional 10 persons; thereby providing seating for a total of 166 persons.

If there were to be a 1 metre gap between the first floor and the windows/perimeter walls on the side and front elevations the indicative seating layout for the worship sanctuary is reduced to 102 persons.

If a first floor were to be constructed along the lines of existing iron columns and with a similar gap along the church's front elevation, the indicative seating layout for the worship sanctuary is reduced to 78 persons.

Both of the latter two options fall significantly short of the 170 seats required by the Statement of Need. Therefore, the only option which would come close to the required number of seats is a wall to wall first floor worship sanctuary.

The suggestion to incorporate areas of clear glass in the first floor has been carefully considered, however this would be incompatible with the building's proposed use due to modesty related concerns (the ground floor and first floor will be in use simultaneously some of the time) and the potential for "glass floor anxiety" amongst congregants using the first floor.

In terms of **point B**, there is a requirement to prevent noise interference between the ground floor and the first floor. Noise interference would be unacceptable as both floors will be in use simultaneously some of the time. During the church's main worship services, crèche facilities are proposed to be provided on the ground floor. In addition, the first floor will be used to provide activities for adults whilst the Sunday School is operating on the ground floor. **(Fig. 14)**

Therefore, a wall to wall first floor is essential to prevent noise interference between the ground floor and the first floor.

The first floor layout has been designed in response to the existing historic structure, with attention paid to preserving external window openings and the integrity of perimeter walls. The new stair and lift circulation space has been carefully designed to



Fig. 15 : Existing photograph. Main feature window on the first floor

be discreetly located in the corner with a capped ceiling so the existing historic structure and roof trusses are on full display and can be read as an architectural feature in a relatively undisturbed view within the worship space on the first floor. This will be a vast improvement over the current layout where the roof trusses are half covered by the first floor level and a full height wall.

The main feature window on the front elevation will once again become the focal point of the worship space. *(Fig. 15)* The layout ensures that this main window feature remains unaltered and retains its full legibility both internally and externally.

Internal partitions have been positioned to respect existing window openings and maintain the architectural legibility of the original elevations. While the new first floor structure inevitably intersects the side windows, this design choice is driven by the specific functional requirements of Baldock Baptist Church, alongside acoustic performance standards.

The structural beams of the new first floor are to be set back from the perimeter walls by 400mm. This has been designed to create a chamfered underside edge to the floor level, to reduce its impact where it intersects the window openings.

The new floor will terminate at the wall line rather than extending into the window openings, leaving the windows clear of interference by the works. All the windows, mullions and their stone surrounds will be untouched by the works apart from any necessary repairs and redecoration. Currently, the existing first floor level intersects 3 windows and the windows are obscured by heavy dark timber balustrades at first floor level. On the first floor, the proposal is for 1100mm high glass safety balustrades to each of the windows which will be fixed to the walls on either side. Proposed secondary glazing at ground floor level will have discreet timber frames fixed to the walls and will be custom designed to slide open for maintenance and the central mullion will align with existing mullions, so they appear minimal from the outside. This secondary glazing also acts as an acoustic barrier which is essential for the proposed simultaneous use of the ground and first floors. *(Fig. 16)*

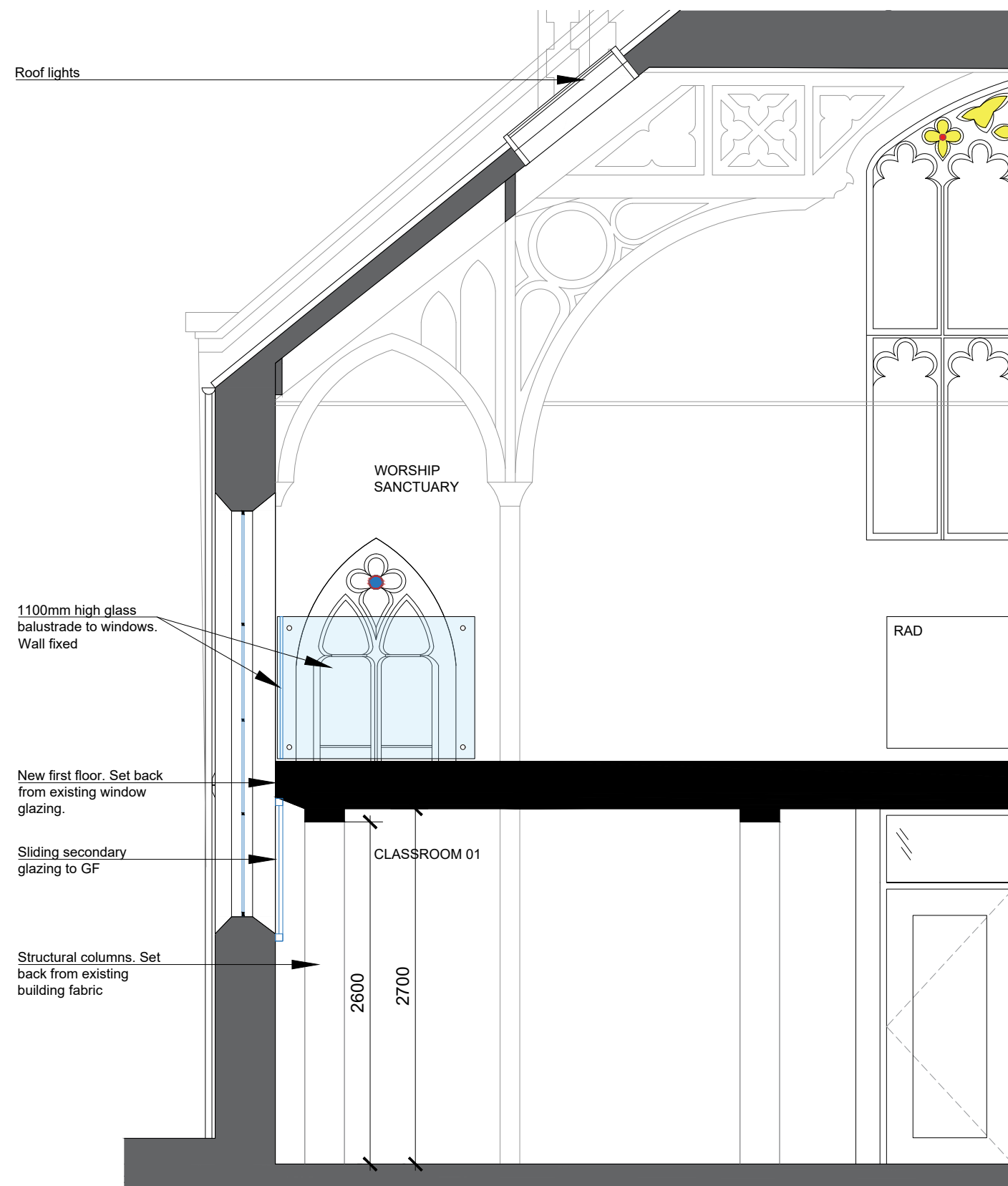


Fig. 16 : Snippet from Section C, Architects drawing 030

This design solution leaves the existing windows untouched and a clear gap between the windows and the new first floor. Hence there will be some appreciation of the double height windows from both above and below.

Justification

The intersection of the first floor and windows is a necessary compromise to achieve the project's feasibility. This solution balances the sensitive preservation of the church's heritage with the practical necessity of creating a large, functional, and sustainable space for the congregation with acoustic separation between the floors.

Any necessary localised interventions are kept to a minimum, reversible and are designed to have a light touch to protect significant architectural features, ensuring the historic envelope remains clearly understood.

The internal remodelling, including the introduction of a wall to wall first floor, has been carefully designed to respect the existing structural grid and ornate roof trusses by locating the open space on the first floor, so the whole of the roof structure can be appreciated.

Glazed front addition

A glazed front extension was discussed at the early design stage but was discounted in response to the Conservation Officer's comments. The intention of this element was to improve entrance legibility, accessibility, and create additional space for WC facilities while providing a more welcoming and functional arrival space.

However, it is acknowledged that its scale and prominence would risk competing with the significance of the original façade. In response, the front addition concept has been omitted to ensure that the historic front elevation remains as existing and the dominant architectural expression.

Planning Policy Context and Legislative Framework

The proposed works have been assessed in the pre-application comments in the context of the relevant statutory duties and development plan policies, including the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the North Hertfordshire Local Plan

2011–2031, and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024).

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The proposals relate to both internal and external alterations to a Grade II listed building.

Internal works fall under **Section 16(2)** of the Act, which requires that special regard is paid to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting, and any features of special architectural or historic interest.

There has been a conscious decision to design the first floor and other internal partitions to be structurally independent from the original building fabric. As the new first floor structure will be self-supporting, this is considered very limited intervention and is a reversible and flexible addition to the building. The internal stair and lift circulation core on the first floor has been designed to be capped off under the original ornate roof structure so it can be read as a whole ceiling design from the worship space as first intended by the Victorians, which is a vast improvement on its current state of the full height wall cutting right through it, breaking up its visual splendour.

The only structural link proposed between the new first floor and the existing perimeter walls are ties which are to be introduced to support the ongoing stabilisation of the church's perimeter walls. These have spread and bowed significantly in their lifetime and the ties are intended to help with stabilisation. *(Fig's. 17 & 18 show the proposed internal layouts)*

External works engage **Sections 16(2), 66(1), and 72(1)**. In particular:

Section 66(1) requires that special regard is given to preserving the listed building and its setting.

Section 72(1) requires that special attention is paid to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.

The proposal to create level pathways and a modestly larger paved space in front of the main entrance doors has been designed to facilitate inclusive access and to enhance the visual appearance. *(Fig. 19)*

Furthermore the existing uneven tarmac path that will be replaced is of no historic significance. The proposed high quality stone paving to the frontage is considered a significant enhancement to this area. Great effort has been taken to minimise the visual changes from the street and to enhance the building's presence by preserving and refurbishing the existing entrance doors and boundary metal gates/railings and pruning overgrown planting.

The proposal to remove the yew tree in front of the church is necessary due to the current harmful impact of the tree to the appreciation of the church's principal elevation. No individual or group Tree Protection Order is in place covering the yew tree. New signage (not exceeding 1.2m²) has been proposed to sit behind the front railings on Whitehorse Street. The only considered external compromise is the rear emergency exit stair from first floor level, which can not be seen from the Conservation Area and from public vantage points. It is necessary to comply with fire safety regulations and has been designed as an independent structure so it can be taken away with minimal damage to the original fabric of the building. The colour will match the brickwork to blend in with surroundings and it is of a light weight minimalist design.

The only other external interventions are in relation to mechanical and electrical services. These cannot be avoided if the building is to be made functional to current requirements. The locations and scale of the interventions have been kept as discreet and small as possible. It is noted that several existing service pipes, etc. will be removed.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011–2031) – Policy HE1

Policy HE1 seeks to ensure that heritage assets and their settings are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Development affected by listed buildings or conservation areas will only be supported where it is demonstrated that the proposals preserve or enhance their special interest.

The proposed works have been informed by a detailed understanding of the building's significance and are designed to be sympathetic to its architectural and historic value, while allowing for its continued optimum viable use as a place of worship.



National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024)

The remodelling and refurbishment are necessary for the continued use of the church as a place of worship. Under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), a key priority is to keep a heritage asset such as a church in their original use. The proposals have also been considered against the relevant paragraphs of the NPPF:

Paragraph 207: A proportionate understanding of the heritage significance of the building has been undertaken, including its architectural, historic, and communal value, and the contribution made by its setting within the surrounding conservation area. The removal of the existing full height wall intersecting the ornate roof structure will significantly improve the readability of the original form, and the new circulation core is sympathetically located discreetly in the corner with a capped ceiling, so it does not harm the visual appearance of the roof structure.

(Refer to the submitted Heritage Statement for further detail)

Paragraph 210: The design approach seeks to ensure that the proposed interventions make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness through sensitive internal design, appropriate materials, and respect for the existing building form. The external appearance and materials of the building will remain as existing and enhanced by improving the hard landscaping.

Paragraph 212: Great weight has been given to the conservation of the heritage asset throughout the design process, with the retention and protection of significant features forming a key consideration. The original windows will be refurbished with the addition of secondary glazing where needed to protect and insulate the building. The original entrance doors will be preserved and refurbished. The ornate roof structure will be refurbished and visually improved by removing the solid masonry wall which presently divides the building. The new layout has been designed to locate the open worship space on the first floor to enable appreciation of the original ornate roof structure and volume.

Paragraph 213: The proposals are supported by a clear and robust justification, demonstrating the operational, accessibility, and functional need for the works,

particularly in relation to securing the building's continued use. The addition of the first floor independent structure is of fundamental importance to secure the building's functional needs with the vertical circulation core a necessity for inclusion of all occupants. The building will be regularly occupied by dual uses for both teaching and worship so the need to create separate defined areas for both activities is essential.

Paragraph 215: Any less than substantial harm identified is considered to be outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme, including securing the building's optimum viable use, improving accessibility, and ensuring its long-term sustainability as a place of worship with community benefit. An identified issue is the first floor intersection with the windows on the side elevations – refer to the text above which describes the approach adopted.

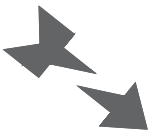


Fig. 19 : Proposed Site Plan

6.0 DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

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6.1 Amount of Development

Internal

The proposed works are mainly internal and contained within the existing envelope of the building. There is an increase in the building's gross internal area with the addition of the first floor. It is currently 235sqm and the proposed design layout will increase this to 349sqm. Therefore, an increase in floor space of 114sqm is proposed, which is necessary for the predicted occupancy numbers and the proposed dual use of the building for teaching and worship – refer to Chapter 4, the Statement of Need for further details.

External

The extent of changes to the external elevations and appearance from Whitehorse Street are minimal. Repairs and restoration works to the church's facade have already been undertaken. The proposal includes upgrading the heating, flues, drainage and emergency lighting, with the proposed Air Source Heat Pump units discreetly placed externally within the landscaping. Eight new roof light windows have been proposed to provide additional natural daylight to the first floor, and an essential metal escape stair to the rear has been proposed for the first floor emergency escape route.

(For proposed external works to the elevations refer to Architects drawing numbers 027 and 028 - Proposed Elevations)

6.2 Layout

The proposed layout is meticulously designed to enhance operational functionality while preserving the integrity of the historic floor plan. A new stair and platform lift core is strategically located in one corner and set back from the main feature window. This will have a capped ceiling design to minimise impact on the building's original roof structure. To maximize the openness of the first floor worship space, all service intensive areas—including teaching spaces, WCs and the kitchen—are concentrated on the ground floor, reducing the need for invasive service runs and preserving the volume of the upper level.

6.3 Scale

The proposals relate solely to internal alterations and do not involve any changes to the external form of the building. As such, the existing massing, height and overall scale of

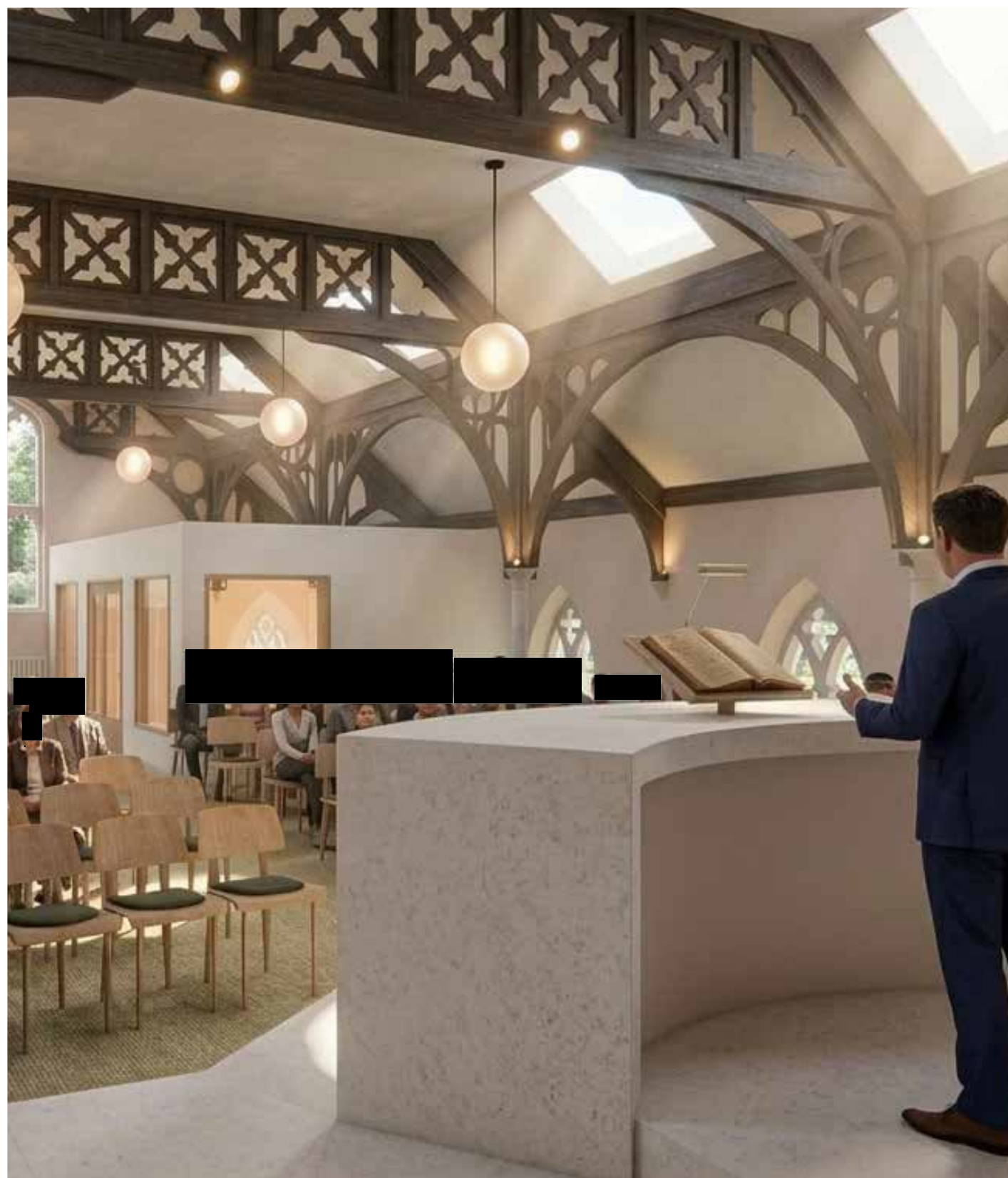


Fig. 20 : 3D visual showing modern contrasting stair core, and pulpit materials

the building will remain unchanged.

The established proportions, roof profile and external envelope will be fully retained, ensuring that the building's architectural presence and its relationship with the surrounding townscape are preserved. The proposals therefore maintain the building's visual prominence and contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

By confining works to the interior, the scheme avoids any impact on the building's external composition, ensuring that its historic form and silhouette continue to be experienced as existing.

6.4 Appearance and Materials

The proposed works are limited to internal alterations and have been carefully developed to ensure a sympathetic relationship with the existing building's character and significance. The approach to materials and appearance is guided by the principle of complementing, rather than competing with, the historic fabric. *(Fig. 20)*

A restrained and high-quality palette of materials is proposed, reflecting the building's ecclesiastical character while accommodating contemporary requirements. New elements will be clearly legible as modern interventions but designed to sit comfortably within the existing interior. Finishes such as timber, plaster and muted tones will be used to echo traditional materials, while avoiding overly ornate or pastiche detailing.

Where historic fabric survives; such as timber joinery, the roof structure and decorative leaded glass, this will be retained, protected and, where appropriate, enhanced. New insertions, including the proposed first floor and reconfigured internal partitions, will be detailed to minimise physical and visual impact on these features. Lightweight construction methods and recessive detailing will be used to preserve an appreciation of the building's original volume and form. The original decorative leaded glass panes will be refurbished and installed within the first floor new circulation core walls. *(Fig. 21)*

The design also seeks to improve the quality of internal spaces, including the introduction of better natural and artificial lighting and flexible bi-folding doors which will enhance



Fig. 21 : 3D visual showing the location of the leaded glass panes. Relocated to the first floor, displayed in within the circulation core walls

the legibility and usability of the building. Materials will be selected for durability, ease of maintenance and suitability for multi-functional community use.

Overall, the proposals adopt a balanced approach that respects the building's historic character while delivering a coherent and contemporary internal environment fit for long-term use. *(Fig. 22)*

6.5 Landscaping Design

Improvements to the hard landscaping in the front yard area will improve the church's accessibility. Refurbishment of the boundary gates/railings and a new church signboard have also been proposed. It is proposed to remove the yew tree immediately in front of the church as this is having a harmful impact on the appreciation of the church's principal elevation and removal of the tree is also required to facilitate the proposed modestly increased paved area. Moreover, nearly all parts of yew trees are poisonous, meaning children and persons with cognitive impairments are at risk. The yew tree is not covered by any individual or group Tree Protection Order.

The large Acacia tree situated immediately behind the front railings makes a positive contribution to the amenity and character of the Conservation Area, however the tree has been subjected to unsympathetic works in the past. It has responded by producing a new crown formed of re-growth in order to try and restore leaf bearing structure. It is therefore proposed to re-profile the tree in accordance with the professional view of an arboriculturist.

Use and Layout

The proposed furniture layouts *(Refer to Architects drawings 024 and 026)* demonstrate that the building can accommodate a capacity of around 200 persons (across both ground and first floors). The internal arrangement has been designed to support this level of occupancy while maintaining clear circulation routes and safe access throughout.

In addition to internal capacity, the proposals recognise the need for adequate external space to support the safe arrival and departure of worshippers, especially given these activities are likely to take place over short periods of time. The paved area and entrance path in front of the church will therefore play an important role in accommodating the

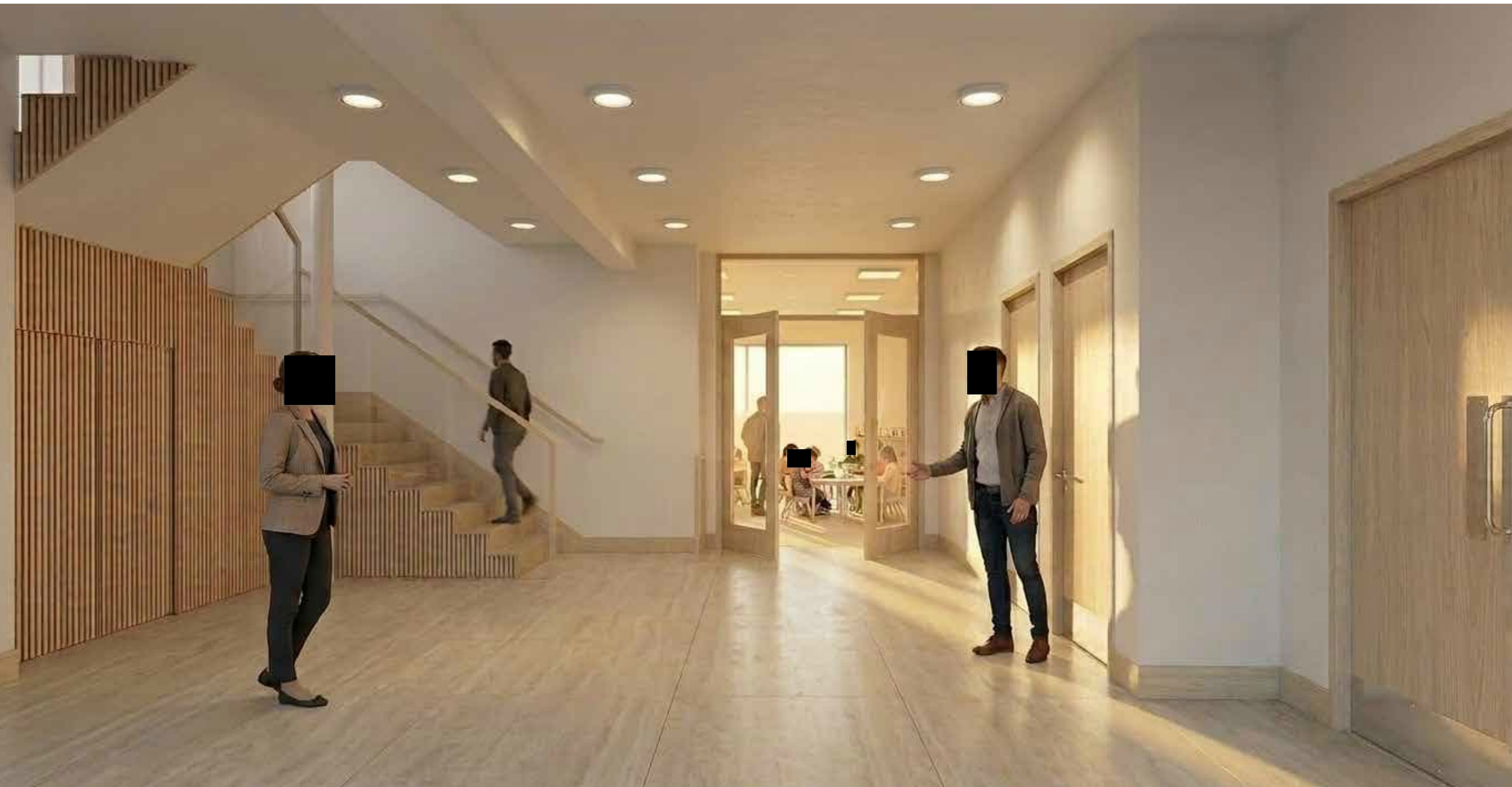


Fig. 22 : Front entrance lobby and stair. Contemporary internal materials proposed as a contrast to the historic building

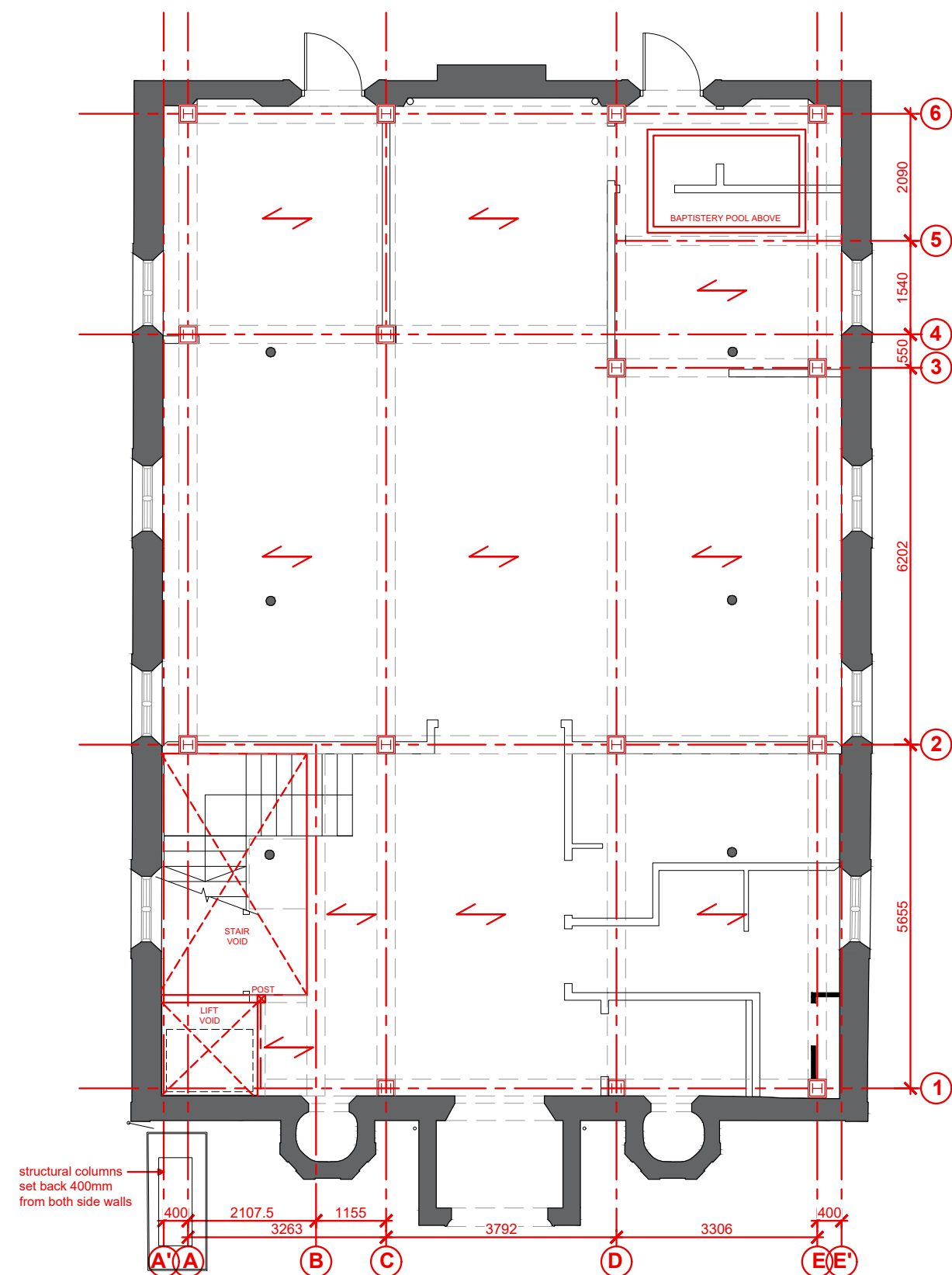


Fig. 23 : Proposed structural layout of the first floor, showing column and beam locations

movements of worshippers, helping to manage peak periods before and after services and ensuring the safe and efficient dispersal of worshippers. The design for a sweeping hard landscaped area in front of the main entrance doors with low level bollard lighting has been proposed for accessibility and for an adequate welcoming environment for worshippers.

6.6 Structural Design

Structural Concept for First Floor

Inserting a wall to wall first floor structure in a manner which minimises impact on the existing building and on the proposed ground floor layout has been the main focus. To this end Gyoury Self Consulting Engineers has designed a structural solution consisting of a steel frame which provides strategically placed columns and beams and a composite steel and concrete first floor slab. The beams and columns to the two side elevations of the church have been set back from the perimeter walls so as to minimise their impact on the windows which extend from below to above the floor. (Fig. 23)

Problems with the Existing Structure

The side elevations perimeter walls of the building have suffered with significant wall spreading, such that the internal dimensions are significantly greater at high level in the centre of the building than at low level at the ends. The extent of this issue is clearly visible to the untrained eye. The primary cause of the wall spreading is a flawed roof design insofar as the roof structure is not triangulated. This means that the rafters do not bear down vertically on the walls but diagonally, pushing them outwards.

It appears that wall spreading ceased at an unknown date some decades ago when internal horizontal wall tie rods were added at eaves level to the three primary roof structure locations. Re-pointing to the side elevations as part of the 1982/83 scheme shows no signs of cracking, suggesting no further wall spreading has occurred over the past 44 years.

Proposed Alterations to the Existing Structure

Given the extent of the wall spreading of the side elevations perimeter walls, the Structural Engineer has recommended that steps are taken to tie these walls to the new first floor structure. Hence tie rods cast into the floor are proposed to pass through the walls to the external face where exposed pattress plates will be fixed. These are located midway between the windows. They are required to further secure the walls from future movement. *(Fig. 24)*

6.7 Mechanical and Electrical Services Design

Heating

A hybrid heating system is proposed for the first floor, with an Air Source Heat Pump (located discreetly in the front yard area as shown on the Landscaping Plan) to provide a baseline level of heat and a gas boiler (located in the WC area) to provide a boost in heat output for particularly cold periods of weather. Heat dispersal will be achieved through a combination of fan assisted radiators and through new air vents installed in the ceiling. The Air Source Heat Pump will provide cooling in periods of hot weather. Radiators on the first floor will be supplied by vertical pipes passing up from the first floor structure, to prevent pipes passing across window positions. It is proposed to heat the ground floor entirely by the gas boiler and heat dispersal will be achieved through the provision of new radiators. These upgrades will reduce the overall carbon footprint of the building.

Ventilation

As the building has no openable windows, there is no opportunity to provide natural ventilation to the proposed ground floor areas. For the hall and the two classrooms, a mechanical ventilation system is proposed with fans and ductwork fixed to the underside of the new first floor and external louvres located on the rear elevation of the building. A heat recovery unit is to be included to ensure a level of sustainability. The kitchen and toilets will have simple independent mechanical extraction systems.

The first floor will benefit from opening rooflight windows. However, these do not provide reliable ventilation, particularly during the colder winter months. Hence, again, a mechanical ventilation system is proposed with fans and ductwork located in the roof void and new ventilation grilles in the ceiling. Substantial external louvres already exist

on the front and rear elevations of the building and the ductwork will utilise these. A heat recovery unit is to be included to ensure a level of sustainability.

Access to the roof void area is proposed via a new ceiling access hatch formed in the existing ceiling.

Electrical Services and Lighting

All new electrical services to be provided will meet current standards. Electrical distribution to the first floor will be provided by cables from below passing through the floor to the local power points, to avoid crossing window positions and the harm this would cause. New energy efficient lighting is to be provided throughout the building.

Other Services

All the services will be renewed throughout the building, including hot and cold water, fire alarm, etc.

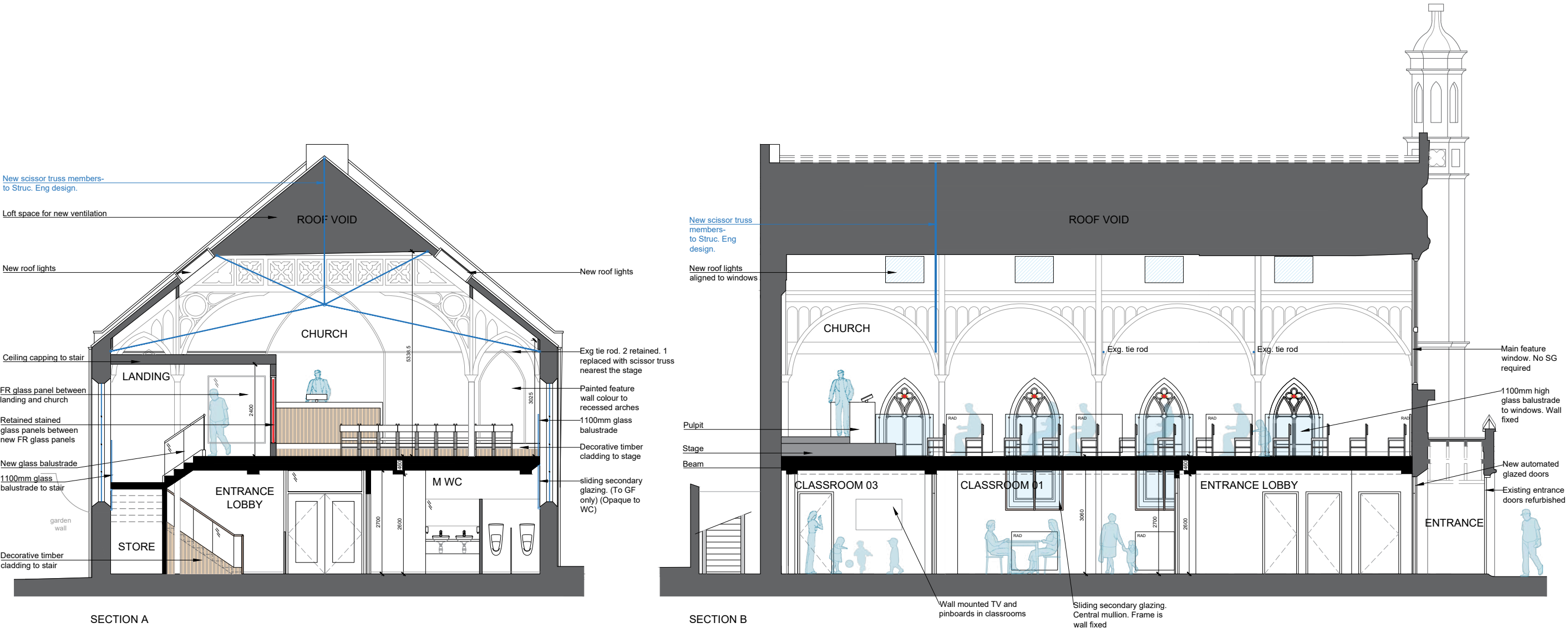


Fig. 24 : Proposed sections displaying the location of the new scissor-truss members

7.0 ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY

7.0 ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY

7.1 Approach and Parking

It is anticipated worshippers will arrive on foot, as there is no capacity for car parking or cycle storage on site - this has been the case throughout the church's existence over the past 170 years. The church is centrally located in Baldock town centre within walking distance of the train station, bus stops and local public car parks.

7.2 Entering the Building

There are existing double doors at the front of the building and it is proposed to refurbish these. They will be on a manual hold-open device during opening times. Internally, there will be a new set of automatically opening glazed double doors between the porch and the entrance foyer. There will be a level threshold between the current internal floor and the new external paving. The two rear emergency exit doors will be improved by removing the concrete step in the passageway at the rear of the church and by removing the internal raised platform. Both of these features currently present accessibility issues. Therefore, all three ground floor doors will have direct level access to external pathways.

7.3 Internal Access

The proposed design has been developed to ensure the building is inclusive, accessible and welcoming to all users, in line with current Building Regulations and best practice guidance for inclusive design.

Internally, the new layout introduces improved circulation routes with widened doorways and routes between the congregation seating, allowing for easier movement throughout the building, including wheelchair users, mobility aids and pushchairs. All new doors will be designed to comply with current accessibility standards, ensuring appropriate clear opening widths and ease of operation. **(Fig. 25)** The automatically opening glazed double doors between the porch and the entrance foyer will have manifestations and the automated button in an accessible location.

An accessible WC and two baby-change facilities have been provided on the ground floor which will be to current Building Regulation standards.

Vertical circulation has been carefully considered to ensure that both the ground and first floor are accessible. Stair provision will be designed in accordance with Building



Fig. 25 : 3D visual showing flexible seating, roof lights and wide door opening to the stair core on first floor

Regulations, with clear handrails, consistent riser/tread dimensions and appropriate visual contrast. Platform lift access will be provided to the first floor, ensuring step-free access between floors and enabling full use of all facilities by all users.

Furniture and seating layouts have been designed to be adaptable to accommodate different event types in each of the main rooms whilst maintaining clear circulation routes. The worship sanctuary on the first floor and the hall and classrooms on the ground floor have been designed to be flexible and inclusive, allowing for a variety of seating arrangements. This includes the integration of wheelchair spaces within the main congregation area, rather than segregated positions, ensuring that all users can participate fully in services and community activities.

Lighting within the building will also be improved to support accessibility. A combination of natural and energy-efficient artificial lighting will be used to create well-lit, comfortable spaces, with particular attention given to reducing glare and improving visibility for users with visual impairments. Circulation routes, stairs and key decision points will be clearly lit to enhance wayfinding and safety. All wayfinding signage will comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that it is accessible, legible and appropriately located. Signage will be designed using clear typography, appropriate sizing and, where relevant, tactile or visual contrast to support users with differing levels of visual ability.

In addition, door finishes and internal colour treatments will be carefully selected to achieve appropriate Light Reflectance Value (LRV) contrast. This will ensure that doors, frames and surrounding walls are clearly distinguishable, improving visibility and aiding navigation for all users, including those with visual impairments or cognitive difficulties.

The approach ensures that wayfinding is clear, consistent and accessible, contributing to a safe, inclusive and user-friendly environment throughout the building.

Overall, the design seeks to ensure that the building is fully inclusive, removing physical barriers and creating an environment that is accessible, flexible and supportive of all users, regardless of age or ability.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

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8.1 Materials

The selection of materials has been carefully considered to support the overall sustainability objectives of the scheme while respecting the character of the existing building. Wherever possible, materials will be responsibly sourced, durable and of high quality to ensure longevity and reduce the need for future replacement.

The proposals prioritise the retention and reuse of existing original building fabric, minimising waste and reducing the embodied carbon associated with new construction. Where new materials are required, preference will be given to those with low environmental impact, including sustainably sourced timber and products with good thermal performance.

Finishes will be selected for their robustness and ease of maintenance, supporting the building's long-term use as a public facility. In addition, the use of lightweight construction methods for new internal elements will help to reduce material consumption and limit intervention into the historic fabric of the building.

Where new materials are introduced, these will be clearly distinguishable from the historic fabric while remaining sympathetic in quality, tone and finish. This ensures that the significance of the heritage asset is not diluted by inappropriate replication or pastiche detailing. New interventions will be lightweight and reversible where possible, minimising the physical impact on the historic structure and allowing for future adaptation without harm to significance.

Material choices will also be guided by durability and compatibility with the existing building, reducing the risk of long-term deterioration or harmful interactions with historic fabric. This is particularly important in areas of interface between new and old construction, where breathable and non-invasive solutions will be prioritised.

Overall, the material strategy seeks to balance environmental responsibility with conservation principles, contributing to a sustainable and efficient building. The proposed materials have been selected with particular regard to the protection and long-term conservation of the Grade II listed building.

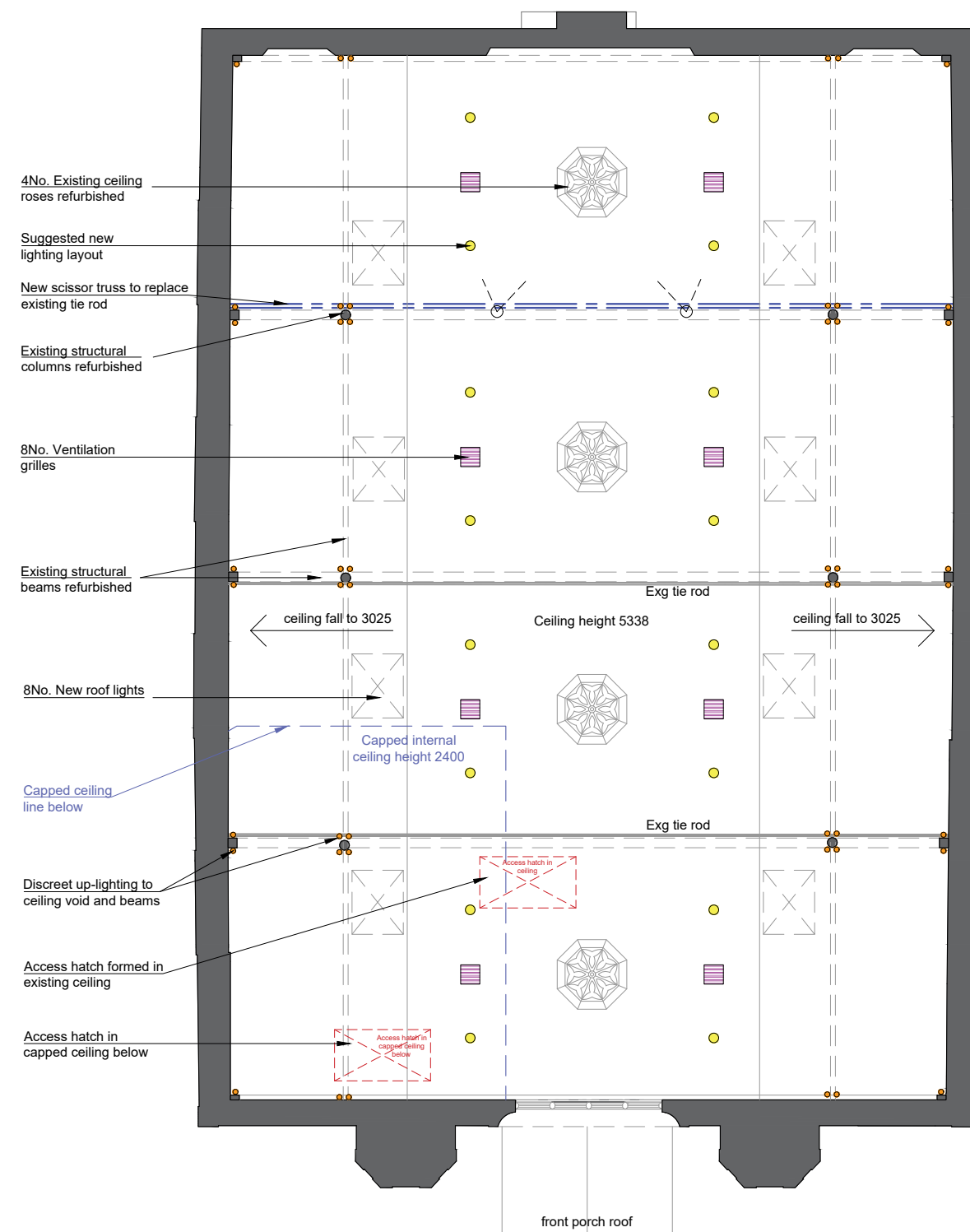


Fig. 26 : Proposed new lighting layout and roof light positions on the first floor

8.2 Energy Efficiency

The proposals incorporate a range of measures to improve the environmental performance and long-term sustainability of the building, while remaining sensitive to its historic fabric.

The existing heating system will be upgraded to a hybrid heating system including an Air Source Heat Pump, thus providing a more energy-efficient and lower-carbon solution that will reduce operational costs and environmental impact. Enhanced roof insulation, where compatible with the heritage features, will further improve overall energy efficiency and internal comfort.

All new lighting will comprise energy-efficient LED fittings. In ancillary spaces, lighting will be controlled by occupancy sensors to minimise unnecessary energy use. External lighting will also be low-energy and sensor-controlled, reducing light spill and energy consumption. **(Fig. 26)**

Water efficiency will be improved through the upgrade of hot water systems and the specification of modern, water-efficient fixtures and fittings, helping to reduce overall water usage.

Together, these measures will support a more sustainable pattern of use, reducing the building's environmental impact while ensuring it remains viable and fit for purpose in the long term.

9.0 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.0 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 Impact on Significance

The building's significance has changed over time due to past alterations, most notably the addition of a partial first floor and associated dividing wall, as part of the 1982/83 scheme. This means it is best understood as an evolved heritage asset rather than an intact historic interior, with value derived from remaining historic fabric, communal use and its townscape presence.

The proposals would introduce notable internal changes, including reconfiguration of the plan form, insertion of a full first floor level, and impact on internal volume and spatial character. These works would affect areas of heritage sensitivity, particularly the legibility of the interior and some surviving historic fabric. The additional space required and the proposed new configuration is deemed necessary for the building to continue to function as a place of public worship and specifically to fulfil the essential needs of Baldock Baptist Church.

However, the building's key external character and contribution to the streetscape would be retained and improved, and its overall ecclesiastical identity would remain intact. The existing level of internal alteration also reduces sensitivity in some areas, and the scheme will allow better appreciation of surviving historic features. *(Fig. 27)*

The Heritage Statement concludes the works are considered to result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Listed Building, with no fundamental impact on its overall heritage value or identity.

Further context and heritage information can be found in the submitted Heritage Statement.

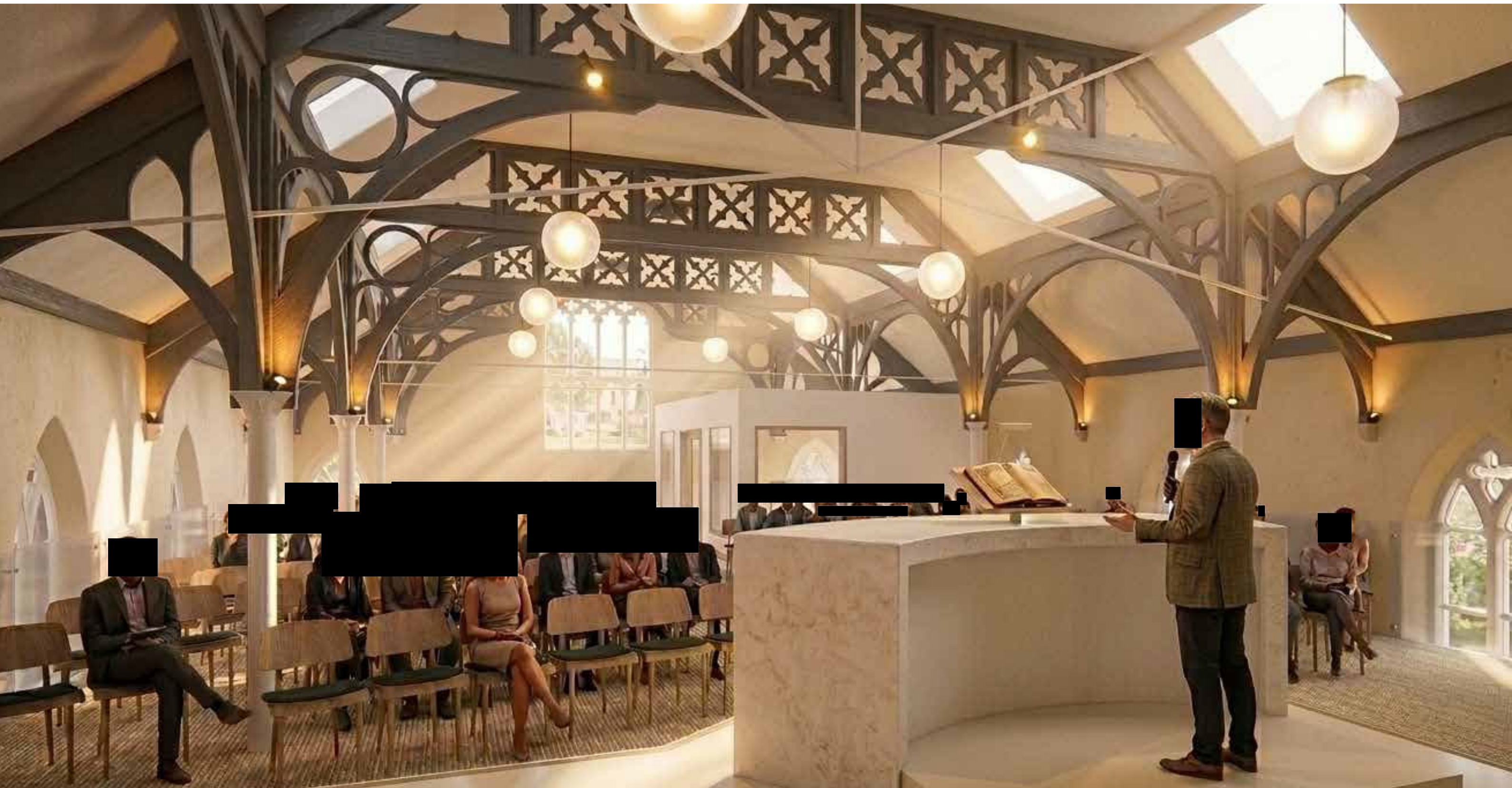


Fig. 27 : Proposed first floor worship space, the new open layout displays uninterrupted views of the main feature window, ornate ceiling and structure

10.0 CONCLUSION

10.0 CONCLUSION

The proposed scheme is necessary and sympathetic and has been shaped by a clear understanding of the Listed Building's heritage significance and its location within the Baldock Conservation Area. The proposed internal remodelling has been informed by extensive pre-application advice received from the Conservation Officer at the Local Planning Authority. Where change is proposed, it has been carefully balanced against the need to secure the building's continued optimum viable use.

Any identified harm is considered to be less than substantial and is outweighed by the clear public benefits of the scheme, including the continued use of the building as a place of worship and the improved accessibility, enhanced flexible functionality and the long-term safeguarding of the heritage asset through active occupation and maintenance.

The project will improve the long-term sustainability and usability of the church building.

Overall, the design has been shaped through a process of iterative refinement, informed by heritage constraints, functional requirements, and pre-application consultation.

Where less than substantial harm arises, it is considered to be necessary to facilitate the building's continued optimum viable use and is outweighed by the public benefits of securing its long-term occupation, accessibility, and community function.

