

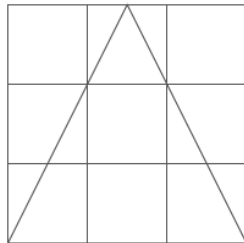
Planning, Design and Access Statement

Demolition of existing Church and Erection of Replacement Church

at:

**Royston Evangelistic Church
York Way
Royston
Hertfordshire
SG8 5HJ**

for:



Axon Architects

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of Axon Architects and Mayway Construction Ltd in support of a detailed planning application for the demolition of an existing church and the erection of a replacement church at Royston Evangelical Church on York Way, Royston.
- 1.2 This document firstly describes the application site, then explains the proposals and the need for a replacement church. Relevant local and national planning policies are then set out. An assessment of the acceptability of the proposals against these policies is then presented.
- 1.3 This planning application is supported by the following documents:
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Croft Ecology.
 - BNG Metric and Condition Assessments by Croft Ecology.
 - Full plans by Axon Architects.
 - This Planning, Design and Access Statement.

2. Site Description

- 2.1 This application concerns the existing Royston Evangelical Church on York Way. Royston Evangelical Church is an independent Bible-believing church, affiliated with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches and has been serving the community from this site for over 40 years.
- 2.2 The application site is located at the junction of York Way and Old North Road in the northern part of Royston. The site is bound to the south and east by these roads with residential properties beyond. To the north and west of the application sites are car dealerships with large showrooms and extensive areas of external parking and vehicle sales displays.
- 2.3 The application site itself includes the church building set at the eastern end of the site separated from York Way and Old North Road by an area of mown grass. The western part of the site contains a large unmarked car park accessed from York Way. Between the parking area and western site boundary is a group of mature trees.
- 2.4 Planning permission was approved for the erection of a church in 1979. This original building has a pyramidal roof above a largely square footprint. The two southern corners are chamfered, the south-western corner which faces towards York Drive accommodates the main entrance. The building is finished in brown brick and render with a concrete tile roof complete with roof lights.
- 2.5 A further building was approved in 2017 and erected between the original building and the northern boundary. This is a small, single storey portakabin that has been faced in brown bricks.

- 2.6 Internally, the original building contains the main worship hall which is centrally positioned and benefits from the additional roof height. Wrapped around this are three storage areas one of which is used for the food bank. The extension accommodates two rooms which are used as classrooms.
- 2.7 As the church is sat back from the road junction and of limited scale it has little presence at the road junction and is somewhat underwhelming.
- 2.8 The Church offers a range of activities for the community including Sunday morning and evening services and bible study groups as well as a parent and toddler group, coffee mornings and a number of youth clubs for different ages. The Church also runs a community food bank which is open twice a week and a community café.
- 2.9 The application site is identified by the red line in the aerial photograph below.



Figure 1 – Application Site

3. Planning History

- 3.1 A search of the Council's planning records has identified the following previous applications:

Reference	Description	Decision
S/1741/78	Erection of new church.	Approved. 23/3/79.
91/00950/1	Retention of Portakabin for youth activities.	Approved. 3/10/91.
92/00049/1	Single storey rear extension to existing church following removal of surrounding grassed mounds.	Approved. 10/4/92.
17/01948/1	Single storey detached building to facilitate classrooms and ancillary works to church.	Approved. 4/10/17.

- 3.2 In addition, this application was preceded by a pre-application enquiry (ref 25/01167/PRE). This set out similar proposals for a replacement church and was broadly supported in the Council's response.

4. The need for a replacement church building

- 4.1 The current building is now too small for the number of people who wish to attend Sunday worship so that this service is currently held at a local community centre. The recent extension consists of Portakabins, detached from the main building which doesn't increase space available for Sunday services and therefore hasn't alleviated the issue. The Portakabins are used as classrooms but feel detached from the main building.
- 4.2 The current building is also too small to accommodate demand for the youth club, which makes activities difficult and prevents the Church from accepting more children. The 'Make Lunch Club' provides free hot meals to children and families during school holidays. Again, these are held in the community centre as the church is too small to accommodate demand and the kitchen is completely inadequate for this activity. The community centre has limited availability as it is the only such space in the town.
- 4.3 The current layout lacks separate spaces and circulation areas to allow different activities to happen simultaneously without conflict. The building also has insufficient storage space for the food bank which is an increasingly important service for the local community. Being 45 years old the building is showing signs of wear and tear and requires investment to extend its longevity.
- 4.4 Rather than try to update and adapt the current building, the Church's preference is to invest in a new 'fit for purpose' building. The aspiration is for the replacement building to be a gateway building for the town, enhance the suburban setting and improve the presence and visibility of the Church at a busy junction. A new building could also potentially allow the Church to expand the activities on offer.
- 4.5 The site is constrained by an Anglia Water drainage pipe running parallel to York Road.

While this can be diverted, the resulting easement still curtails the amount of the site that can be developed.

5. Proposed development

- 5.1 To address the Church's aspirations, this application seeks planning permission for the demolition of the existing church and the erection of a replacement church. The existing church building, including the more recent extension will be demolished and a new church building will be erected on a similar footprint at the eastern end of the site.
- 5.2 This application proposes a two-storey structure positioned closer to the road junction. The increased scale and the position closer to the junction creates greater presence in the street scene and reflects the Church's aspirations for a gateway building.
- 5.3 The proposed design retains the main building entrance to York Way which is formed by a two-storey gable with double height feature glazing. This is to allow more visibility into the building which will be more open and welcoming for the community. The proposals incorporate a chamfered corner facing the junction which will contain signage on a rendered wall, this aspect reflects the design of the current building.
- 5.4 The building is proposed to be finished in brick and render with a tile roof, again in keeping with the existing building. The roof will also accommodate solar photovoltaic panels.
- 5.5 Internally, the main entrance leads to a foyer accommodating a cafe space for the congregation to use informally as well as before and after services, it will also be used as a flexible space for other Church activities. Services will take place to the rear of the building in a main hall which will incorporate a stage, storage space and bi-folding doors allowing part of the room to be sectioned off for separate use. The entrance foyer is served by a kitchen, while a dedicated room for the food bank has also been accommodated along with a small office. A corridor leads to toilet facilities and a stairwell and lift to the first floor.
- 5.6 The first floor occupies only the front of the building with the main hall having a double height ceiling to the rear. The first floor provides accommodation for three classrooms. The internal layout provides a range of rooms to suit the variety of activities that the Church runs while incorporating dedicated storage for the food bank.
- 5.7 The vehicle access is retained unaltered from York Road with the car park reconfigured to accommodate more spaces which will be formally marked out. The car park will contain designated EV charging spaces. A sustainable drainage attenuation system will be accommodated under part of the car park.

6. The Development Plan and Material Considerations

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance, the development plan consists of North

- 6.2 The relevant policies are therefore considered to be Local Plan policies SP1 (Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire); SP9 (Design and Sustainability); HC1 (Community Facilities); T1 (Assessment of Transport Matters); T2 (Parking); D1 (Sustainable Design); D3 (Protecting Living Conditions); NE4 (biodiversity and geological sites) and NE12 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development).
- 6.3 The main material considerations are the North Hertfordshire Sustainability SPD and the National Planning Policy Framework. The application site does not fall within an area covered by a neighbourhood plan.

Development Plan

- 6.4 The application site is within the urban area of Royston and falls under an existing employment site designation with a much wider area of land to the north and west. The application site is clearly not an employment use and that designation is considered not to be relevant to the application site.
- 6.5 Policy SP1 concerns sustainable development and states that the Council will maintain the role of key settlements within the District as the main focus for housing, employment and new development making use of previously developed land where possible.
- 6.6 Policy SP9 concerns design and sustainability. This states that the Council will '*support new development where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context*'.
- 6.7 Policy HC1 sets out the Council's approach to community facilities. This states that:
- Planning permission for new community facilities will be granted provided that they are:*
- a) Appropriate in scale having regard to their local context;*
 - b) Accessible by a range of transport modes; and*
 - c) Would meet an identified need in the local community.*
- 6.8 Transport policy is set out under policy T1. This states that '*planning permission will be granted provided that development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the highway network*'.
- 6.9 Parking requirements are set out in Policy T2. This refers to parking standards contained within the Vehicle Parking SPD. Table 5.4 within this document refers to non residential parking standards for class use D. For places of worship, the maximum car parking standard is one space per 10m² of gross floor area.
- 6.10 Policy D1 concerns sustainable design and sets out a number of criteria that development proposals are expected to meet. Of relevance to this application is the need to respond positively to the site's local context and to take all reasonable opportunities to create or enhance public realm, incorporate sustainable drainage systems and reduce energy

consumption and waste.

- 6.11 Living conditions are protected under policy D3 which seeks to ensure that the living conditions of an existing development are not affected by a proposed use.
- 6.12 Biodiversity policy is set out under policy NE4. This states that all development should deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity and geodiversity, contribute to ecological networks and the water environment, and/or restore degraded or isolated habitats where possible.
- 6.13 Lastly, renewable and low carbon energy development is addressed through policy NE12. This states that proposals for these forms of development will be permitted subject to an assessment of the impacts upon a number of criteria which include visual amenity, the transport network and the amenity of residents.

Material Considerations

- 6.14 In addition to being in accordance with the development plan, planning applications must also be considered against any relevant material considerations. In this instance the material considerations are considered to be the North Hertfordshire Sustainability SPD and the National Planning Policy Framework.

North Hertfordshire Sustainability SPD

- 6.15 The Sustainability SPD was adopted in late 2024 and provides information regarding the Council's sustainability expectations for development, and offers good practice guidance to developers.
- 6.16 The SPD sets three standards to be aimed for, gold, silver and bronze across eight themes based on broad sustainability topics. These themes are optimising passive design and fabric performance, achieving low carbon energy, minimising carbon footprint, healthy place-making, promoting biodiversity, sustainable travel, conserving water and incorporating sustainable drainage.
- 6.17 New development is not expected to achieve the highest standards across all themes rather the expectation is for applicants to select individual themes on which to excel.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 6.18 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking this means:
 - *approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
 - *where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:*
 - *the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development*

proposed; or

- *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.*

6.19 Paragraph 39 expects local planning authorities to approach decision taking in a positive and creative way and seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

6.20 Of particular relevance to this proposal is the need to promote healthy and safe communities which is set out in section 8. Paragraph 98 states that:

To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- *plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments; and*

- *ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community.*

7. Planning Balance

7.1 The main considerations in determining this application are considered to be:

- a) Principle of development;
- b) Design and scale;
- c) Accessibility;
- d) Amenity;
- e) Ecology;
- f) Sustainability;
- g) Transport and car parking; and
- h) Material considerations.

Principle of development

7.2 The application site lies within the settlement boundary of Royston as identified on the Local Plan Policies Map. Policy SP1 of the Local Plan directs new development to existing settlements and promotes the reuse of previously developed land.

7.3 Policy HC1 concerns community facilities and states that:

Planning permission for new community facilities will be granted provided that they are:

- a) Appropriate in scale having regard to their local context;*
- b) Accessible by a range of transport modes; and*
- c) Would meet an identified need in the local community.*

- 7.4 Community facilities are therefore acceptable in principle. Parts (a) and (b) above will be addressed in the next two sections below. With regards to (c), whether the community facility would meet an identified need, there is a current need which isn't currently being met by the existing building. The congregation cannot be accommodated in the space available and therefore services are currently taking place elsewhere. This demonstrates that there is an identified need for a replacement church which can accommodate the congregation and allow the Church to operate its other activities without constraint.

Design and scale

- 7.5 The first criteria of policy HC1 requires a new community facility to be appropriate in scale. The proposed development is two storey, replacing an existing single storey building. The surrounding residential properties are two storey while the car dealership buildings to the north and east, while single storey, are substantial in their height and scale. The existing building lacks presence at the road junction, the proposed increase in scale is considered appropriate in this spacious corner plot to better address the junction and create more of a gateway to the town.
- 7.6 The proposed scale of the building is therefore considered to be appropriate in this context and an enhancement on the existing building.
- 7.7 In terms of design, the proposed church is modern with a two storey element to York Way and a single storey element behind. Larger areas of glazing are included on the principle elevation to create an active frontage. The corner facing the York Way / Old North Road roundabout is chamfered reflecting the existing building and provides a more interesting elevation to the road junction, creating an opportunity for signage.
- 7.8 In the pre-application response the Case Officer refers to the design as an improvement on the external appearance of the existing building and appropriate in its context. The response goes on to say that there are no objections to the scale form and external appearance of the proposed replacement building.
- 7.9 The scale and design are therefore considered to be suitable for the application site and address criteria (a) of policy HC1. Policy SP9 which requires new development to respond positively to its local context and policy D1 sustainable design are also considered to have been met.

Accessibility

- 7.10 Criteria (b) of policy HC1 states that community facilities should be accessible by a range of transport modes. The congregation is largely local, with 85% of the regular attendees living with Royston. Therefore a good proportion of the congregation will arrive on foot and cycle hoops have been included in the design to encourage cycle access. The site is well served by bus routes from within the town and further afield and access by train is also possible.
- 7.11 Bus route 16 is a local service around Royston and stops along York Drive as well as at Tesco about 300m north of the application site. Route 18 goes further afield and serves

Buntingford before passing through Royston and again stopping at Tesco. Route 17 connects Royston to a number of surrounding villages and also to Cambridge.

- 7.12 Royston also benefits from a train station which offers regular fast connections to Cambridge and London. The station is a round 10 minutes walk from the application site.
- 7.13 The application site is therefore considered to be very accessible by a range of transport modes and therefore the second criteria of policy HC1 is also met. It has now been demonstrated that all three criteria of policy HC1 have been addressed therefore this policy would support the granting of permission for a replacement church.

Amenity

- 7.14 Policy D3 ensures that new development does not detrimentally affect the amenity of existing surrounding uses. The use of the site as a place of worship is established therefore there will be no additional impact on neighbouring properties in that regard.
- 7.15 The nearest residential property is on the opposite side of York Way to the south of the site. That property faces Old North Road but has side facing windows orientated towards the application site. At ground floor level is a close boarded fence while at first floor are two windows which are around 22m from the proposed glazed entrance. While there is extensive glazing at first floor on this elevation, this is a void space forming part of the double height entrance therefore no over looking will occur. A further window on this elevation serves a classroom, however it is considered that 22m is not an uncommon window to window distance in an urban area especially across a road. This property will therefore not suffer from any sense of overlooking or loss of amenity.
- 7.16 Residential properties do not directly face the proposed development across Old North Road and therefore will not be impacted. Commercial properties bound the application site to the north and west but are set well away from the proposals. No detrimental impact on any existing neighbouring user is therefore likely to occur and the proposals can be considered to accord with policy D3.

Ecology

- 7.17 The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecology Appraisal (PEA) and Biodiversity Net Gain Metric prepared by Croft Ecology.
- 7.18 The PEA concludes that there are no statutory or non-statutory designated nature conservation sites, or Priority Habitats were found within 1km of the Site and that none of the habitats recorded within the site are irreplaceable habitats. There are no features suitable for roosting bats were identified on trees or buildings during the survey. The metric demonstrates that a net gain of 10.53% can be achieved through the planting of nine small trees within the site.
- 7.19 The proposals are therefore considered to have no detrimental impact on ecology and comply with Local Plan policy NE4 biodiversity and geological sites and national biodiversity net gain policy.

Sustainability

- 7.20 Policy D1 concerns sustainable design and the Sustainability SPD covers the topic more broadly. Both expect the design of new development to address sustainability.
- 7.21 This proposal has incorporated measures to address the majority of the themes from the Sustainability SPD. Firstly, promoting biodiversity has been addressed through meeting BNG requirements on site as set out above.
- 7.22 The proposed design includes solar panels on the south facing roof slopes to generate electricity for use within the building. This is considered to be the most appropriate form of generation for the site, energy demand and the aspirations of the applicant. The new building will incorporate electric heating and cooling units which can be run in part from the solar supply. This will deliver a significant carbon saving over the existing church.
- 7.23 The proposals also include electric vehicle charging points within the reconfigured car park. These are a requirement under the SPD's sustainable travel theme. The site is also easily accessible by a range of non-car modes as discussed above.
- 7.24 The design proposals also include a crated sustainable drainage system under part of the car park. This will collect and attenuate run off from both the building and the car park. Again this is an enhancement over the current building where storm water is connected to the combined sewer. This aspect of the proposals addresses the incorporating sustainable drainage SPD theme.
- 7.25 The proposals therefore incorporate various sustainable design features to meet the requirements of the SPD and policy D1.

Transport and car parking

- 7.26 The current site has a large car park to the western part of the site. This is not marked out but can accommodate around 25 vehicles. The application proposes to reconfigure and formally mark out the parking area which will allow 28 spaces to be provided.
- 7.27 Local Plan policy T2 and the Vehicle Parking SPD would expect a maximum car parking provision of one space per 10m² of gross floor area. The proposed church will have a gross floor area of 530m² and a maximum parking provision of 53 spaces. 28 spaces are therefore within the required standard but also not considered to be an under provision. As set out earlier under accessibility, the site is well served by a range of alternative modes of travel and a large proportion of the congregation are local and walk to the church. The congregation also includes a lot of families who will travel together.
- 7.28 The existing access to the site is unaltered through these works. The amount of vehicle movements is not considered to increase dramatically as the size of the congregation will remain as existing.

Material Considerations

- 7.29 There are two material considerations to be taken into account in the determination of this application. The Sustainability SPD has already been addressed above. The remaining material consideration is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The framework encourages Local Authorities to approve sustainable development where possible.
- 7.30 Paragraph 93 of the NPPF encourages Local Planning Authorities to plan positively for the provision of community facilities, including places of worship, to enhance the sustainability of communities.
- 7.31 Paragraph 93 continues and states that planning decisions should '*ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community*'.
- 7.32 The provision and modernisation of community facilities, including places of worship, is therefore supported by the NPPF.
- 7.33 The development has been found to be in accordance with the development plan and be supported by the NPPF. The proposals are therefore considered to be suitable for approval.

8. Access

- 8.1 Access to the application site is unaffected by these works. The existing access will serve the new church and reconfigured car park. Vehicle movements are not anticipated to change significantly.
- 8.2 Access to the proposed church itself will be level to comply with the Building Regulations in this regard. Accessibility will be improved compared with the existing building which is accessed by way of a series of steps from the car park.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 Royston Evangelical Church has operated from the application site for over 40 years. The current church building is no longer fit for purpose to the point that Sunday services currently take place elsewhere.
- 9.2 This application proposes replacing the existing church with a slightly larger building on a similar part of the site. The proposed design addresses the Church's need for a larger worship space and for more flexible spaces to be used by their other clubs and activities along with a dedicated area for the food bank.
- 9.3 The replacement of the church has been found to be supported in principle by the adopted Local Plan. In particular policy HC1 supports the enhancement of community facilities subject to being of appropriate scale, accessible and addressing an identified need. This

submission has demonstrated that the proposed development reflects the two-storey scale of nearby residential properties, is accessible by foot, bus and train in addition to car and the need is demonstrated by the congregation currently having to meet elsewhere.

- 9.4 The design of the proposed building is an enhancement on the existing and will have a greater presence in the street scene on this corner plot. In addition the proposals will generate less carbon emissions than the current building and will include solar panels, EV charging points and sustainable drainage attenuation as required by the Sustainability SPD and policy D1.
- 9.5 The proposed development has been found to accord with the development plan and be supported by the NPPF. Approving these proposals will allow the church to once again accommodate its full range of activities back under one roof, serving the community of which it has been part for the last 40 years.