

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	26/00229/FP
CASE OFFICER:	HT
APPLICATION SITE:	St Marys Church Hall, Church Street, Baldock Hertfordshire SG7 5AE
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Single storey front extension. Roof extension over existing front entrance and new glazed doors and window screen in forward position, installation of 3 rooflights to existing rear roof slope, replace existing dormer windows on front slope with rooflights and alterations to existing fenestration, including retention of two windows on existing side elevation. Installation of solar panels to existing front roof slope, and installation of an air source heat pump onto each side elevation. Access ramp to new fire exit door on side elevation following bricking up of existing fire exit. Formation of a disabled/maintenance parking space and landscaping.

RECOMMENDATION:

I provide these comments as North Herts' Conservation Officer and not in my role as the Local Authority representative on the St Albans DAC. Generally, I find the proposal acceptable but there are a few matters I raise that are worth examining further. I await a response before offering a final recommendation.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on significance of St Mary's Church and the character and appearance of the Baldock Conservation Area

The proposal will have a small yet noticeable impact upon the church's setting slightly affecting its significance and will impact upon the appearance of the BCA.

SITE CONTEXT:

St Mary's Church is grade I listed and is in the Baldock Conservation Area. Both the building and the area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 20 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. The list entry is given at the link below.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1347611?section=official-list-entry>

The church hall has existed for 36 years and although located within the curtilage of St Mary's Church (to the north-west of the principal building), the hall is not curtilage-listed. The hall is set back from the highway and is located within a typical churchyard setting consisting of grassland and gravestones. The site has pedestrian links onto Church

Street, Sun Street, Hitchin Street and The Gardens. It is noted that the church hall does not contribute to the significance of the site but does provide an important facility for the church and wider community as it is not only used by the church and its congregation but is available for hire for use by the community and is also used as a local food bank service.



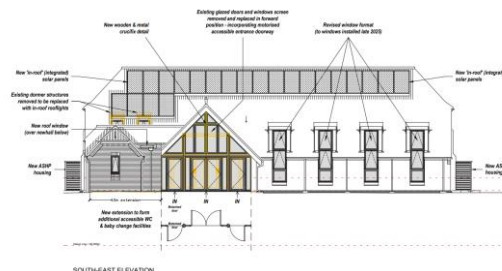
DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Below I have separated the proposal into its many parts:

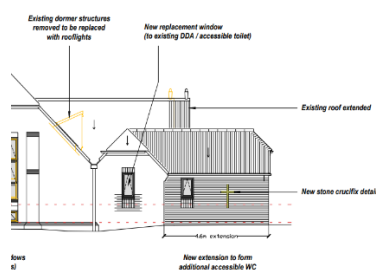
Single storey front extension.

Under the subheading 'Statement of Need' in the Statement of Significance it reads:

The new toilet extension is proposed to provide facilities for the young and old alike as well as new baby change areas - all located at ground floor level. These additions are ultimately proposed to replace the extant basement located facilities which are currently difficult to access.



I have a few minor observations, the first being that it is slightly unfortunate that barge board to the gable of the existing gable entrance is truncated to facilitate connection with the extension. Having said that, the gable remains almost intact. Next and perhaps a more valid point, I question the location of the window to the 'front' WC. I would have thought it better to place a window on the south-west elevation i.e. where the stone crucifix detail is proposed and to move the stone crucifix onto the front elevation thereby denoting the entrance to the hall. Otherwise, this aspect of the scheme is acceptable as no harm would be occasioned to heritage assets.

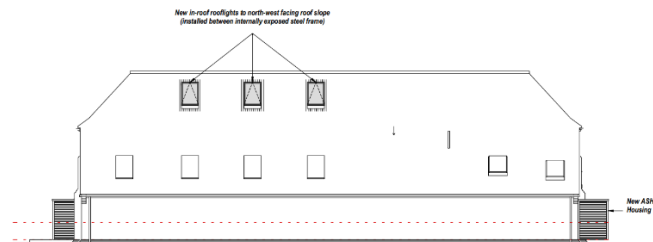


Roof extension over existing front entrance and new glazed doors and window screen in forward position.

Unobjectionable as no harm would be occasioned to heritage assets.

Installation of 3 rooflights to existing rear roof slope.

The reason given for this is 'to increase natural light and improve ventilation'. My slight concern is that their size and position (high up in the roof plane) will mean these are more prominent when viewed from properties directly to the north (albeit these would not be public viewpoints). I would encourage smaller roof lights positioned slightly further down the roof if that can be achieved.



Replace existing dormer windows on front slope with rooflights and alterations to existing fenestration, including retention of two windows on existing side elevation.

Unobjectionable as no harm would be occasioned to heritage assets.

Installation of solar panels to existing front roof slope, and installation of an air source heat pump onto each side elevation.

These installations are intended to reduce running costs through enhanced energy efficiency by providing a sustainable means of power for both lighting and powering of proposed air source heat pump units. The solar panels are to be integrated into the roof. Historic England says:

Roof-integrated PVs function both as a roof covering and an energy generator. Whilst these have the potential to offer a reduced visual impact, they do not fully replicate the appearance of slates or tiles. They also have a very short lifespan compared to slates and tiles. This means they are generally not suitable for use on prominent roof slopes of listed buildings and the advantages of mounting them in less visible locations is very limited.

Their performance as a roof covering must also be carefully considered and the risk of compromising the weather-tightness of the roof. It is important to consider how the PV tiles/slates will weather and change over their lifespan, which may alter their visual appearance and performance as a roof covering.

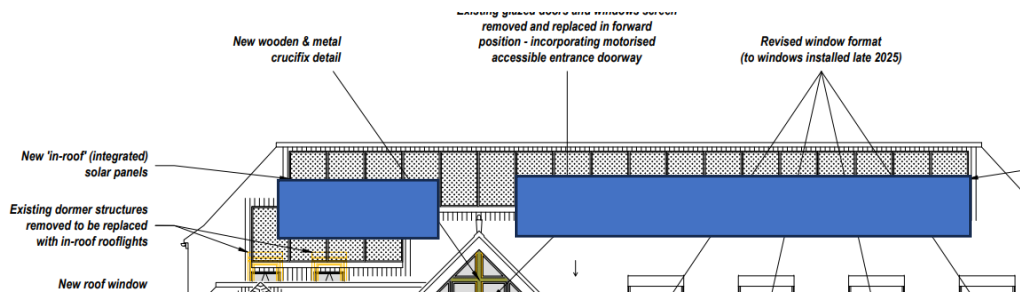
PV slates are integrated with the roof tiles or slates with flashing, in much the same way that flashings are used to weather the abutment with a roof light. However, these are only compatible

with certain types of existing roof coverings, so, unless the whole roof covering is being replaced, it is essential to check compatibility with the manufacturer. It is also important to ensure that ventilation can be maintained behind the array to ensure there is not a build-up of heat that will affect the array output.

There is a case to suggest that the array of solar panels will have a detracting impact upon the hall building and the setting to St Marey's Church. The panels are positioned high up on the front roof slope. I am not opposed to some solar panels particularly considering that paragraph 4 of HE6 of the NPPF states (my emphasis in red)

*Where a development proposal would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset the effect on the asset and its significance should be weighed against any public benefits resulting from the proposal. Important public benefits can include securing the long-term reuse of a vacant or underused listed building and **enabling energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures to be employed.***

Due to their position on the roof, they would be very close to the ridge. Also, is there sufficient distance between the top of the new rooflights and the bottom of the lower solar panels to ensure a good weathering detail? In my opinion, the impact can be ameliorated if the number of panels was reduced and the continuous coverage separated as indicated below in blue which would still achieve a 16-panel scheme (a reduction of 6no. panels).



Access ramp to new fire exit door on side elevation following bricking up of existing fire exit.

Unobjectionable as no harm would be occasioned to heritage assets.

Formation of a disabled/maintenance parking space and landscaping.

Drawing no. 24BAL201 Revision I is annotated with the following:

Disabled/Maintenance Parking - 2.9m x 5.5m space formed with concrete edging and Grasscrete matting with grass planting.

I find this proposal unobjectionable as no harm would be occasioned to heritage assets.



HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:**Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:**

Sections 66(1) and 72(1)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

Policy HE1

NPPF (Aug 2026):

Section 20

CONCLUSION:

Please see points raised. Overall, I do not consider that there would be sufficient harm to justify an outright heritage-based objection merit but there are few matters worthy of consideration before determination:

- i. Window to WC in extension and location of stone crucifix detail;
- ii. Number and position of integrated solar PV array on front roof slope; and
- iii. Size and position of roof lights on rear roof slope.

Upon receiving a response, I will happily review my position on this.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 08/09/2026