

Statement of Need (SoN)

June 2026

for

Listed Building Consent (LBC) - Internal re-modelling and refurbishment of the former Baldock Methodist Church including demolition of 1980s insertions, installation of a new first floor throughout the building, provision of new external fire escape stair and fire exit to the rear of the building, addition of rooflights to the slated roof, together with associated external alterations, installation of a new church sign board, hard landscaping works and removal of the yew tree within the front curtilage.

Background

Baldock Baptist Church was established in 2006 and has a Sunday congregation currently numbering around 100 – 110 congregants. In addition, the church runs a Sunday School currently numbering around 40 children. As well as the church's Sunday activities, the church provides a growing programme of midweek activities, including Bible studies and meetings for prayer, children's clubs, youth meetings and pastoral support sessions. Future additional activities are under consideration, including a regular 'mums and toddlers' meeting.

Importantly, all the church's activities are free to attend and most are open to all members of the public and various outreach activities are undertaken on a regular basis to encourage participation from the local community.

For all its existence, Baldock Baptist Church has worshipped at Baldock Community Centre, located on Simpson Drive, Baldock. The venue has provided adequately for the church's activities, however, growing numbers of congregants and aspirations to provide an even greater number of activities and meetings has led to the need for the church to acquire its own property.

Many members of Baldock Baptist Church live in the locality and feel a strong tie to serving the town of Baldock. This has presented the difficult challenge of purchasing suitable property for the church within the town. A unique opportunity to purchase the vacant Baldock Methodist Church property (*hereafter BMC*) arose in 2025 and the church was successful in purchasing BMC.

BMC, located on Whitehorse Street is Grade II listed and was constructed in 1853 in the Tudor style, with red brick stucco dressing and featuring a gabled front with two octagonal turrets capped by small cupolas. Aerial photography taken in 1925 shows a modest scale church hall attached to the rear of the church building, however declining congregations and financial pressures led to the church disposing of its hall to a housebuilder in 1982/83, as part of the redevelopment of land

adjacent to Orchard Road. An internal photograph of BMC taken in 1936 also affirms the presence of the hall behind the church building and shows the configuration of the main church building including pews, a raised pulpit, a large pipe organ and commemorative wall mounted stone tablets.

Significant internal reordering of BMC occurred in 1982/83, to coincide with the loss of the church hall. All internal fixtures were removed and disposed of, except for some decorative leaded glass panes, thought to have originated from a glazed screen separating the entrance vestibule from the body of the church. A smaller replacement pipe organ was installed, originating from a redundant Methodist Chapel at Chertsey, Surrey. A first floor was constructed through approximately the front third of the church and this portion of the building was partitioned into smaller spaces to provide a minister's vestry, kitchen facilities, WCs, meeting spaces and an entrance vestibule. No step free access was provided to first floor level and a solid masonry wall was constructed from floor to roof height, having the effect of splitting this portion of the church from the remainder with no linkage between, other than one set of doors at ground floor level and a small serving hatch from the kitchen. The very large, central window on the front elevation was cut off from the main worship sanctuary, providing light only to the first floor meeting room. The 1982/83 scheme has resulted in an ill proportioned, poorly naturally lit and unattractive worship sanctuary, with the effect of feeling cut off and isolated from the front third of the building.

BMC continued to operate until June 2024, when closing services were held.

Thus it can be seen that BMC has already been subject to huge changes, leading to the loss of part of the building and; moreover, much of the historic fabric of the remaining church building has been lost. There are incongruous additions that detract from the building's original layout and character. All of this has resulted in significant harm to the special character of the listed building.

Statement of Need

As has been explained, for all its existence, Baldock Baptist Church has worshipped at Baldock Community Centre, located on Simpson Drive, Baldock. The venue has provided adequately for the church's activities, however, growing numbers of congregants and aspirations to provide an even greater number of activities and meetings has led to the need for the church to acquire its own property.

Many members of Baldock Baptist Church live in and around Baldock; therefore from a sustainability perspective, it is highly desirable for the church to remain located in Baldock. Moreover, members feel a strong commitment to continue to serve the community of Baldock. This has presented the difficult challenge of purchasing suitable property for the church within the town.

Owing to a chronic lack of potentially suitable properties within Baldock, the church has undertaken a rigorous assessment of the local property market over a sustained period, including the feasibility of purchasing and converting various commercial and entertainment properties across the wider area. Unfortunately, indicative purchase and conversion costs prohibited further consideration of these properties; and in any case, locations outside of Baldock made these properties less desirable for the church.

However, a unique opportunity to purchase the vacant BMC property arose in 2025 and Baldock Baptist Church was successful in purchasing the property.

For BMC 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 hardstanding to avoid crowding situations in front of the church before and after 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 must be stressed 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.

Summary of proposed works to Baldock Methodist Church

The following summary of proposed works to BMC would satisfy the essential needs of Baldock Baptist Church and address all of the present identified hindrances within BMC:

- 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 Henry Speechly pipe organ
- Construction of a first floor throughout the entirety of the building. All of the first floor would be the worship sanctuary, including a vestibule 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 a generous sized entrance foyer, a small multi-use hall with theatre style seating for 60 persons (with alternative furniture layouts available), two classrooms (with the ability to double as vestries), a modest kitchen facility and WC provision (including an accessible WC)
- Installation of a fire exit door and an external steel fire escape staircase at the rear of the church for emergency exit purposes only
- Essential cleaning and restoration works to the building facade
- Comprehensive landscaping enhancements to the front curtilage, comprising the extension and resurfacing of the hardstanding, the creation of new soft landscaped areas, and the removal of the yew tree and the sympathetic reduction of the acacia tree; together with the installation of a new church sign and the restoration of the boundary railings and gates

Benefits of the proposal and the planning balance

The applicant accepts the proposals would cause a *less than substantial* degree of harm to the listed building. However, the following material reasons are considered by the applicant to outweigh the identified harm:

1. The proposals would ensure the long term functional viability and continuation of BMC as a place of Public Worship. The proposals would enable Baldock Baptist Church to continue to provide all the benefits it currently provides, free of charge, to the community of Baldock and would allow the church to fulfil its aspirations to offer an even greater number of meetings and activities in the future. Moreover, given that many members of the church live in and around Baldock, there is a clear sustainability benefit for the church to remain located in Baldock.
2. The proposals are of a high quality design and would complement the historic fabric and special character of BMC. The proposals maximise the openness and viewing of the very large and impressive biaxial timber roof trusses, which are now the principal point of historical interest. The retention and re-use of decorative leaded glass panels thought to have originated from the original entrance vestibule will preserve a clear link to the church's past. All new materials introduced in the building will be high quality, modern and minimalist, to create a clear distinction between original features of the building and new elements. The addition of roof light windows will provide adequate daylight to avoid the need for excessive artificial lighting and provide a means of passive ventilation. Given that views of the church roof from public spaces are very minimal, the external visual impact of adding roof light windows is thought to be negligible.
3. The proposals would reverse much of the harm to the listed building, caused by the 1982/83 scheme. This would primarily be achieved by reinstating the original footprint and openness of the church's main worship sanctuary, albeit with an elevated floor level - creating a well proportioned and attractive space with a high level of natural illumination. The very large, central window on the front elevation will be reinstated as a focal point within the worship sanctuary; restoring the original connection between the facade and the worship space and restoring a degree of the building's historic sense of scale.
4. The proposals allow for essential cleaning and restoration works to the building facade. Enhancements to the front curtilage will greatly benefit the functionality of the church building and will complement the historic fabric and special character of the listed building.

5. The proposals avoid the need to consider more harmful interventions, which would provide the required additional floorspace in alternative ways – such as a new glass construction within the front curtilage, which would cause very significant harm to views of the facade.
6. The proposals will deliver maximum flexibility and full accessibility to all areas of the building.
7. The proposals would require the removal of the Henry Speechly pipe organ, located in the current sanctuary. Whilst regrettable, the removal of the organ can only be considered a neutral factor in the planning balance as it is not an original fixture in BMC, indeed having only been present since 1982/83. Notwithstanding this, the applicant undertakes to seek a sustainable disposal route for the organ – either through a private sale or donation to “Pipe up for Pipe Organs” - a British charity established in 2022 seeking to rehome unwanted British pipe organs.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires decision makers to balance the protection of historic, listed places of worship with the viability of their ongoing use. In the case of BMC, it has clearly been demonstrated that the *less than substantial* degree of harm which would be caused to the listed building by the proposals would not justify the building’s cessation of use as a public Place of Worship. The applicant has taken pragmatic steps to ensure harm to the historic fabric and the special character of the listed building is kept to a minimum and the proposal reverses much of the harm caused by the 1982/83 scheme.

Conclusion

For all of the reasons identified above, the applicant contends that the benefits the proposals would deliver *significantly and demonstrably* outweigh the identified harm to the listed building and therefore the application should succeed.