



Baldock Methodist Church, Whitehorse Street, Baldock

HERITAGE STATEMENT

CLIENT: Trustees of Baldock Baptist Church

ABSTRACT

This Heritage Statement, prepared to support proposals for the internal reordering of Baldock Methodist Church, a Grade II listed building within the Baldock Conservation Area. The scheme seeks to secure a viable, accessible and sustainable place of worship and community facility. While resulting in less than substantial harm to the altered interior, the building's principal significance is preserved, and the harm is outweighed by public benefits, including continued use, improved accessibility and long-term conservation.



23rd June 2026

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Executive Summary

This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of an application for Listed Building Consent for works to Baldock Methodist Church, a Grade II listed building located within the Baldock Conservation Area. The proposals seek to secure the long-term, viable and sustainable use of the building as an active place of worship and community facility.

The building is of architectural, historic and communal significance. Its principal significance derives from:

- its external form and composition as a nineteenth-century Methodist chapel;
- its contribution to the character and appearance of Whitehorse Street; and
- its continued use as a place of worship.

While the building retains evidential and architectural interest internally, this has been materially affected by late twentieth-century alterations, which have reduced the coherence and legibility of the interior. The proposals comprise a comprehensive internal reordering of the building to provide a flexible and accessible layout. Key elements include:

- insertion of a mezzanine level;
- reconfiguration of internal spaces and circulation;
- provision of step-free access;
- improved facilities to support worship and community use.

External changes are limited and would not materially affect the building's architectural character or its contribution to the conservation area.

The principal heritage impacts arise from changes to the internal plan form and spatial character, particularly as a result of the mezzanine insertion. These works would:

- alter the perception of internal volume;
- reduce aspects of ecclesiastical legibility; and
- modify the relationship between internal spaces.

However, the extent of harm is moderated by the building's existing altered condition and its primary significance, particularly its external form and townscape contribution, would be preserved.

The proposals are assessed as giving rise to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset. The scheme delivers clear public benefits, including:

- securing the continued and viable use of the building;
- improving accessibility and inclusivity;
- enhancing functionality for worship and community use; and
- reducing the risk of underuse or vacancy.

In this context, the identified harm is justified and outweighed by the public benefits. The proposals represent a proportionate and carefully considered intervention that would sustain the building's communal role while preserving its key elements of significance.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Proposals

This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been prepared to inform and support proposals for the internal reconfiguration and associated adaptation of Baldock Methodist Church.

The purpose of this report is to assess the likely effects of the proposed works on the **significance, character and special interest** of the heritage asset and, where relevant, its setting. The assessment has been commissioned to accompany proposals intended to secure the building's continued and viable use as a place of worship and associated community facility, whilst responding to the operational, accessibility and functional requirements of the congregation.

The proposals arise in the context of the church's identified need for a building capable of supporting a broad range of worship, teaching, pastoral and community activities within a coherent, accessible and fit-for-purpose internal arrangement. In broad terms, the reconfiguration proposals are intended to improve the building's functionality, flexibility and inclusivity, while seeking to retain, reveal and appropriately respond to those elements of the building which contribute positively to its heritage significance.

The proposals also include the introduction of new heating, cooling and ventilation systems intended to improve occupant comfort, energy efficiency and environmental performance. These works comprise a hybrid heating system, mechanical ventilation with heat recovery, associated ductwork and plant, and the installation of an Air Source Heat Pump.

This report should therefore be read as an evidence-based assessment of the **heritage implications of change**, and not as a statement of architectural, structural or legal compliance.

Scope of Work

This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared to:

- identify and describe the **heritage significance** of the Site;
- consider the Site's architectural, historic and evidential interest, including the contribution made by surviving historic fabric and internal spatial character;
- assess the degree to which the significance of the building has been affected by previous alteration and adaptation;
- review the likely impact of the proposed reconfiguration works on the significance and special interest of the heritage asset;
- consider whether any degree of harm would arise and, if so, the nature and extent of that harm;
- identify any elements of potential heritage benefit, enhancement or improved legibility arising from the proposals; and
- provide an assessment framework to inform the planning and heritage balance.

The scope of this report is proportionate to the nature of the proposals as presently understood. It is focused principally on the **internal reordering and adaptation of the**

building, together with any associated works materially relevant to the heritage significance of the asset.

Objectives of the Assessment

The principal objectives of this Heritage Impact Assessment are as follows:

1. **To establish significance**
To identify the heritage significance of the building, including those elements of fabric, form, plan, detailing and spatial character which contribute to its special interest.
2. **To understand the impact of previous change**
To consider the extent to which earlier phases of alteration and remodelling have affected the building's historic character, legibility and evidential value.
3. **To assess the effect of the current proposals**
To evaluate the likely impact of the proposed reconfiguration on the significance of the building, including whether the proposals would preserve, reveal, alter or diminish aspects of heritage value.
4. **To support informed decision-making**
To provide a clear and reasoned heritage assessment capable of assisting the local planning authority, conservation officers, design team and client in understanding the acceptability and proportionality of the proposals.
5. **To inform the planning balance**
To assist in determining whether the proposals would amount to heritage harm and, if so, how that harm should be weighed against the public, functional and viability benefits said to arise from the continued and optimised use of the building.

1.2 Methodology

This assessment has been prepared in accordance with established heritage practice and has been informed by a review of available documentary, visual and site-based evidence.

The methodology has included, as appropriate:

- a site inspection of the building and its immediate context;
- review of available architectural drawings, sketch proposals and design information;
- consideration of the building's historic development, including known phases of alteration;
- review of any available list description, local heritage records, mapping, photographic evidence and relevant published sources;
- identification of the building's heritage significance, including surviving elements of evidential, historical, architectural and communal value;
- assessment of the contribution made by the existing internal plan form, surviving historic fabric, and principal spaces;

- analysis of the proposed works against the significance identified;
- evaluation of likely impact using the established heritage planning concepts of **preservation, enhancement, less than substantial harm, and proportionality**.

The assessment has been prepared on the basis of the information made available at the time of writing. It should therefore be understood as applying to the scheme as currently drawn and described. Any material amendment to the proposals may require further review.

The report has also been prepared having regard to the general principles set out in **Historic England's Conservation Principles** and associated good practice relating to significance-led assessment, although it is intended primarily as a planning and heritage impact document rather than a full conservation management document.

1.3 Policy and Statutory Context

Statutory Duties

Baldock Methodist Church is a Grade II listed building situated within the Baldock Conservation Area. As such, proposals affecting the building are subject to the statutory duties set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

In particular:

- Section 16(2) requires the decision-maker, in considering whether to grant listed building consent, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses;
- Section 66(1) requires special regard to be had to the desirability of preserving the listed building and its setting when considering planning applications affecting it; and

These statutory duties provide the primary legal framework against which the proposals must be assessed.

National Planning Policy Framework

This assessment has also been prepared having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular Chapter 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment.

The NPPF confirms that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. In broad terms, it requires that proposals affecting heritage assets should be informed by an understanding of significance, should seek to avoid or minimise harm, and should be supported by a proportionate level of information sufficient to enable the impact of the proposals to be properly understood.

Paragraph 207 of the NPPF confirms that the significance of a heritage asset may be harmed or lost through alteration or development within its setting. It requires decision-makers to take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and of putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.

The assessment therefore begins by identifying and understanding the significance of Baldock Methodist Church and those elements that contribute most strongly to its special interest.

Paragraph 208 requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal to a level of detail proportionate to the asset's importance and sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposals. This Heritage Statement has been prepared on that basis and includes an assessment of the building's historic development, significance, surviving fabric and capacity for change.

Paragraph 212 states that where a development proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. The planning balance set out later in this report has therefore considered both the degree of heritage harm arising from the proposals and the range of public benefits associated with the continued use, accessibility, sustainability and long-term conservation of the building.

Paragraph 219 recognises that opportunities should be taken to enhance or better reveal the significance of heritage assets and requires local planning authorities to look favourably upon proposals that preserve elements of significance whilst enabling a viable future.

The assessment therefore considers not only potential harm arising from the proposals but also opportunities for enhancement, including the retention and reuse of surviving historic features, improved appreciation of the building's architectural character and measures that support its long-term conservation.

Overall, these provisions establish a framework that seeks to balance the conservation of significance with the sensitive adaptation necessary to secure the continued beneficial use of historic buildings. The assessment that follows has been prepared in accordance with these principles.

Local Planning Policy

At local level, the relevant policy framework is provided by the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 (adopted November 2022), together with any other relevant supplementary guidance and conservation area evidence applicable to Baldock town centre.

In broad terms, local policy seeks to ensure that proposals affecting heritage assets are informed by a clear understanding of significance, conserve those elements that contribute positively to special architectural and historic interest, and ensure that any change is justified, proportionate and appropriately designed.

For the purposes of this assessment, the relevant policy position is therefore one which supports the careful management of change, recognising both the need to conserve significance and the need, where appropriate, to enable historic buildings to remain in viable and beneficial use.

Approach of this Assessment

This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared within that statutory and policy context. It therefore considers:

- the significance of Baldock Methodist Church as a listed building and as a contributor to the Baldock Conservation Area;
- the extent to which that significance survives, including the effect of previous alteration;
- the likely impact of the proposed works on the significance of the asset; and
- whether any resulting degree of harm is justified and outweighed by the benefits of the scheme.

The assessment is intended to provide a proportionate and evidence-based heritage analysis to inform both the current proposals and the decision-making process.

Particular regard has been had to NPPF paragraphs 207, 208, 212 and 215 in identifying significance, assessing impacts, considering opportunities for enhancement and undertaking the final planning balance.

Structure of this Report

The remainder of this Heritage Impact Assessment is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** – Site Description and Historical Development
- **Section 3** – Assessment of Heritage Significance
- **Section 4** –Description of the Proposed Works and
 - Heritage Impact Assessment
- **Section 5** – Conclusion and Planning Balance

1.4 Background: Baldock Methodist Church (BMC) – Statement of Need

Need

The proposals are driven by the requirement to secure a viable, accessible and sustainable place of worship and community facility within Baldock. The existing building, in its current configuration, does not adequately support the operational, functional and safeguarding needs of the congregation. The proposed internal reordering is therefore intended to provide a coherent, flexible and inclusive layout capable of accommodating contemporary patterns of worship, teaching and community use, while ensuring the building remains fit for purpose in the long term.

Alternatives

A search for alternative premises within Baldock and the surrounding area was undertaken but did not identify any suitable or viable options. Potential sites were discounted on the basis of cost, availability and/or location outside Baldock. The acquisition and adaptation of Baldock Methodist Church therefore arises from necessity rather than preference, with the proposals representing the most realistic means of meeting the identified needs within the town.

Functional Requirements

The building is required to accommodate:

- a principal worship space for approximately 170 people;
- ancillary meeting and teaching rooms;
- foyer and waiting space;
- kitchen and WC facilities;
- full step-free access throughout;
- a layout that supports safeguarding requirements; and
- sufficient external space to accommodate congregation movement before and after services.

Existing constraints

The existing internal arrangement is constrained by a full-height dividing wall, poor spatial relationships, limited natural light, lack of step-free access and insufficient ancillary accommodation. These limitations materially restrict the building's ability to function effectively as a modern place of worship.

Viability and continued use

Without intervention, the building is unlikely to remain in active use by the congregation, creating a risk of disposal and potential loss of its current communal function.

Overall, these factors establish a clear and credible case for intervention, subject to demonstrating that the extent of change is proportionate and represents the minimum necessary.

The proposal is supported by a **justification for significant internal reordering**, structured around a sequence of heritage arguments:

- there is a genuine and evidenced need for adaptation –Statement of Need;
- there are no preferable local alternatives;
- the building in its current form is not fit for the intended use;
- previous alterations have already diminished aspects of its significance;
- the principal surviving significance can be better revealed through change; and
- without intervention, the long-term occupation and use of the building may be jeopardised.
- The scheme will meet the Conservation mandate that a building is best kept in use.

PLANNING HISTORY

Prior to closure in 2024, 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).

Pre App Response 2026

Pre-application advice was issued on 2nd March 2026, in respect of Listed Building Consent for works to Baldock Methodist Church. Some of the concerns noted have been dealt with by alterations/clarifications to the proposals:

- The scale and positioning of the rooflight windows – roof elevations have been updated to reflect comments received
- The first floor staircase/lift vestibule's positioning relative to 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
- A mezzanine filling the wall to wall space.

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.

2.0 HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical Development of the Area

Whitehorse Street forms part of Baldock's historic town centre and reflects the medieval street pattern of narrow plots, continuous frontage development and direct relationship to the highway.

The street developed incrementally from the medieval period through later Georgian and Victorian rebuilding, with much of its present character deriving from this layered evolution rather than wholesale redevelopment.

Baldock town centre is designated as a Conservation Area, within which the retention of historic plot structure, building form and streetscape character is a key consideration.

2.1.1 History of Baldock Methodist Church

Baldock Methodist Church dates from the mid-19th century (c.1853) and represents the expansion of Nonconformist worship within the town during the Victorian period.

The building was constructed within an already established historic street frontage and forms part of the incremental development of Whitehorse Street.

Its historical significance is reinforced by its association with nearby buildings connected to the minister and wider Methodist presence in the town, illustrating its role within Baldock's religious and communal life.

2.2 Description of the Building

The site comprises a Grade II listed Methodist church located within the Baldock Conservation Area.

The building is a purpose-built nineteenth-century ecclesiastical structure constructed in red brick with stucco dressings. The principal elevation is symmetrical, with a central gable flanked by two octagonal turrets. Pointed-arch openings and a large traceried front window contribute to its Gothic / Tudor-influenced character.

The building is set back from Whitehorse Street behind a small enclosed forecourt, forming part of its setting and townscape presence.

Internally, the building retains a recognisable ecclesiastical form, comprising a principal worship space with ancillary accommodation. Surviving features of interest include roof trusses, stained or leaded glass elements, and selected timber joinery and fittings.

Reference to Listed designation

The Methodist Church was listed on 15 August 1974 with the following description:

Second half of C19 in Tudor style. Red brick stucco dressed. Gabled front with 2 octagonal turrets either end capped by small cupolas. The Methodist Church, Nos 13 and 17 to 21 (odd) form a group.

The listing refers to its architectural calibre as well as noting its location within a visually prominent position within the established streetscape. It forms part of a wider group of historic buildings along Whitehorse Street, contributing positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The church is a purpose-built nineteenth-century ecclesiastical structure, designed in a restrained Gothic-influenced style. BMC was constructed in the Tudor style, with red brick stucco dressing and featuring a gabled front with two octagonal turrets capped by small cupolas.

Architectural Character and Evolution

The principal elevation is of clear townscape interest, defined by its vertical emphasis, ecclesiastical form, and traditional detailing, including a large traceried window and decorative entrance. The building makes an important contribution both as an individual listed structure and as part of the wider historic grain of the town centre.

Internally, the building retains a recognisable ecclesiastical form and volume, though altered over time. The current arrangement comprises a principal worship space with ancillary rooms and circulation areas, reflecting significant later remodelling. Surviving features of heritage interest include timber joinery, stained glass, roof structure, and the building's continued communal and religious function.

Major internal reordering took place in 1982–83 following the loss of the church hall. This involved removal of most fixtures, retention of some decorative leaded glass, installation of a replacement organ, and insertion of a first floor within the front third of the building. This area was subdivided to provide ancillary accommodation, with no step-free access and separation from the main worship space by a full-height wall. The works disrupted the relationship between the front elevation and interior, isolating the main space and reducing natural light, resulting in a poorly proportioned and visually disconnected worship environment.

Amongst the most significant surviving internal features are a series of decorative leaded glass panes currently located behind the raised platform area at the front of the church. These are understood to have originated from an earlier glazed screen separating the entrance vestibule from the principal worship space and are thought to have been relocated during the 1982/83 alterations. The panes provide rare surviving evidence of the church's earlier internal arrangement and contribute to the evidential and architectural interest of the building.

The church remained in use until June 2024.

Setting

The building is set back from Whitehorse Street behind a modest enclosed forecourt, which forms part of its immediate setting and allows appreciation of the principal façade. The relationship between the building, its boundary treatment and the street contributes to its heritage significance and is relevant to any proposed external changes.

Trees

The forecourt contains a mature yew tree positioned immediately in front of the principal elevation and a mature Acacia tree located behind the front boundary railings. Whilst the Acacia contributes positively to the verdant character of the church forecourt and wider

conservation area, the yew tree partially obscures views of the principal elevation and limits appreciation of the building's architectural composition from Whitehorse Street.

2.2.1 Later Alteration (1982/83¹)

A significant phase of internal alteration took place in 1982/83, following the disposal of the rear church hall and the reconfiguration of the remaining building for continued use. These works materially changed the internal arrangement and are important to understanding the building as it survives today. They form part of the building's continuing history of adaptation and occupation, and provide important context for understanding the present proposals.



The **plan drawing (Appendix A)** provides clear evidence of the 1982/83 phase of alteration, illustrating the extent of internal reordering undertaken following the loss of the rear hall. The proposals shown, including demolition of the rear hall and classroom, removal of internal elements such as the balcony and partitions, and subdivision of the principal worship space to create ancillary accommodation at ground and first floor levels, correspond directly with the known works from this period.

The 1982/83 works are understood to have included:

- removal of earlier internal fixtures and fittings, including historic seating and other liturgical furnishings;
- loss of the earlier internal arrangement associated with the original chapel interior;
- insertion of a first floor structure within approximately the front third of the building;
- subdivision of this front portion into a series of smaller ancillary spaces, including meeting rooms, kitchen facilities, WCs and circulation space;
- construction of a full-height masonry wall dividing the front part of the building from the principal worship space;

¹ Planning Ref: **82/00475/1LB**

Application for Listed Building Consent to demolish rear hall and classroom and internal alterations to main building

- interruption of the original visual and spatial relationship between the entrance and the main body of the church;
- loss of the original relationship between the principal front window and the main worship space, with the window thereafter serving the upper meeting room rather than the sanctuary; and
- installation of a replacement pipe organ originating from another chapel.

The plans confirm the insertion of a new upper floor within the front portion of the building and the reconfiguration of circulation and service spaces. No alterations were proposed to the external elevations or roof, reinforcing that the primary impact of these works was on the internal spatial arrangement and architectural coherence. This evidence supports the assessment that the present interior is the product of substantial late twentieth-century intervention, which has materially altered the building's original ecclesiastical plan form and reduced the legibility of its historic spatial hierarchy.

2.3 Surviving elements: Plan Form, Fabric and Character

The significance of Baldock Methodist Church does not derive from the survival of a wholly intact nineteenth-century interior, but from a combination of its strong external architectural character, selected surviving internal features, and the continued legibility of the building as a historic place of worship.

The building has undergone notable phases of alteration and adaptation over time, most significantly through the internal reordering carried out in 1982/83. As a result, the heritage value of the asset is mixed across all parts of the building. Some elements survive strongly and continue to make a clear contribution to significance, while others have already been altered, removed, or diminished through later intervention.

A proper understanding of what survives and what has already been lost or changed is therefore essential in assessing both the significance of the building and its capacity to accommodate further change.

External Survival

The building retains a strong degree of external architectural integrity and continues to express clearly its historic identity as a purpose-built nineteenth-century Methodist chapel.

The principal elements of significance that survive externally include:

- the overall form, scale and massing of the building;
- the steeply pitched roof form and gabled principal elevation;
- the distinctive twin octagonal entrance turrets capped by cupolas;
- the symmetrical front composition and strong vertical emphasis;
- the principal front window and associated Gothic / Tudor-influenced detailing;
- the pointed-arch window pattern to the side elevations;
- the red brick walling and lighter dressings; and

- the building's set-back relationship to Whitehorse Street, including its enclosed forecourt and boundary treatment.

Overall, these elements ensure that the church remains readily legible as a historic ecclesiastical building and continues to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of Whitehorse Street and the Baldock Conservation Area.

In heritage terms, the principal external significance of the building survives clearly and remains one of the strongest aspects of the asset's special interest.

Internal Survival

Internally, the survival of significance is more selective, but a number of important features and characteristics remain.

The principal elements of internal significance understood to survive include:

- the overall ecclesiastical form and identity of the principal worship space;
- the surviving height and sense of volume to the main body of the church;
- the decorative and visually expressive roof trusses / structural arches, which form one of the most distinctive architectural features of the interior;
- the pointed-arch window reveals and the associated pattern of natural light;
- the broad liturgical orientation and legibility of the building as a place of worship;
- the organ and selected elements of timber joinery / church furnishing, where historic or of heritage interest; and
- the surviving decorative leaded / stained glass panels, including those understood to have been retained from an earlier internal screen.

Although the interior no longer survives as a wholly intact historic chapel interior, these features continue to contribute materially to the significance of the listed building. In particular, the roof structure and the continued readability of the building as a worship space remain important to its architectural and communal character.

Degree of Alteration and Loss

At the same time, the building has already been materially altered internally, most notably through the works undertaken in 1982/83 following the loss of the rear church hall.

Those works are understood to have included:

- removal of earlier internal fixtures and fittings;
- insertion of a first floor structure within the front part of the building;
- subdivision of the former entrance / front section into smaller ancillary rooms;
- construction of a full-height dividing wall separating the front portion of the building from the principal worship space;
- loss of the original visual and spatial relationship between the principal entrance and the main body of the church; and

- interruption of the relationship between the large front window and the principal worship space.

These changes have already affected the original internal plan form, circulation pattern and spatial coherence of the church. In particular, they have diminished the legibility of the original volume and altered the way in which the building's ecclesiastical interior is experienced.

This is an important heritage consideration. It means that, while the building clearly retains significance internally, the present internal arrangement does not represent a wholly intact or highly sensitive nineteenth-century interior in all respects.

General Status of Plan Form and Fabric

The present plan form should therefore be understood as an already altered arrangement, in which elements of the original ecclesiastical layout survive alongside later interventions of varying quality and significance.

The church continues to retain a recognisable historic worship space and clear ecclesiastical identity, but its original internal logic has been partly obscured by later reconfiguration. The building should not therefore be understood as either wholly intact or wholly compromised; rather, it survives as a heritage asset in which significance remains clear, but selective.

In fabric terms, the building appears to retain:

- the principal external envelope and walling;
- the historic roof form;
- the principal window openings and some decorative glazing;
- significant structural roof elements; and
- selected internal features and fittings of heritage interest.

Other internal finishes, partitions, service elements and fittings are understood to be later insertions of lesser heritage value.

Overall, Baldock Methodist Church retains strong external significance and selected but meaningful internal significance, notwithstanding the effects of previous alteration. That surviving significance provides the basis for the more detailed assessment of significance and sensitivity set out in the following section.

A summary of Architectural character is given in Appendix B.

Summary of Existing Condition

The building should be understood as a historic church that retains strong external architectural character and selected internal features, but whose internal arrangement has been materially altered by later reordering.

Its significance therefore derives from a combination of surviving historic fabric, overall ecclesiastical form, and continued legibility as a place of worship, rather than from the complete survival of an intact historic interior.



Main entrance from enclosed lobby



Nave showing alter roof truss and organ



Windows and supporting posts



Alter



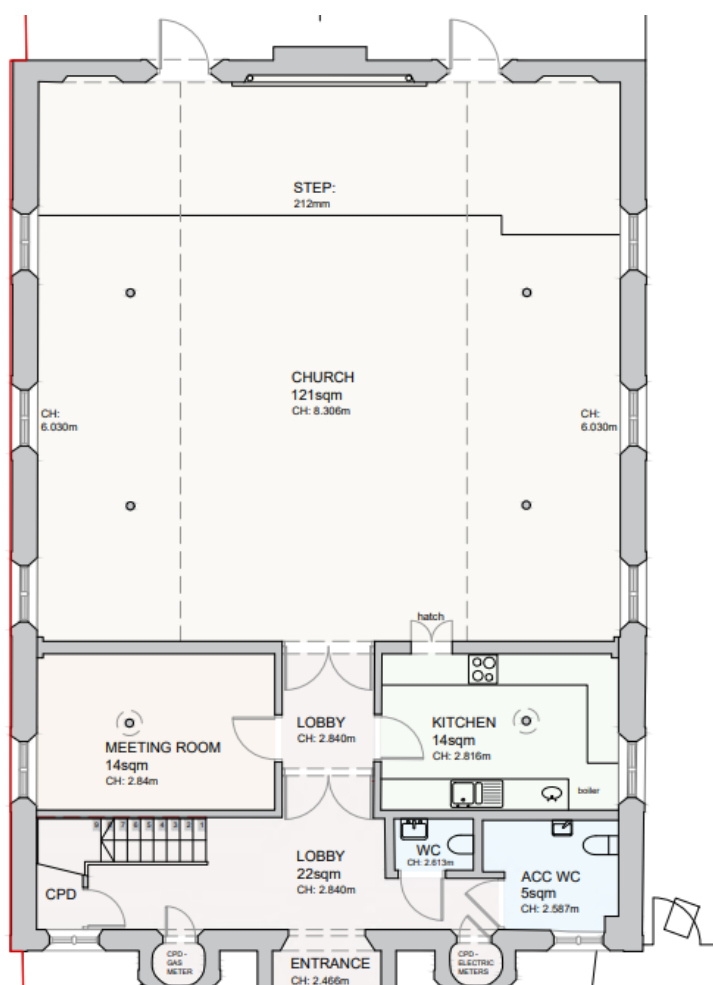


Figure 1: Plan Form, ground floor

2.4 Initial Heritage Assessment

From a preliminary heritage perspective, the significance of the building derives from a combination of:

- its status as a **nineteenth-century listed church building**;
- its **architectural presence**;
- its **historic and communal value** as a long-established place of worship;
- the survival of **selected historic fabric and detailing**; and
- the legibility, to varying degrees, of its original ecclesiastical character and spatial form.

However, it is also evident that the asset has experienced a degree of internal change over time. The extent to which those alterations have affected the legibility of the original plan form, architectural interest and evidential value will therefore be an important consideration in the assessment of significance set out in the following section.

Accordingly, the heritage assessment that follows considers not only the age and designation of the building, but also the extent to which its special interest survives, has been altered, or may potentially be better revealed through sensitive reconfiguration.

The significance of the church therefore resides in a state of being altered and the subsequent survival of its overall architectural identity, form and function, notwithstanding a degree of later alteration.

2.5 Summary of Previous changes and Constraints

The church is not a static or untouched building, but one that has necessarily undergone a degree of repair, alteration and adaptation over time in order to remain in active use. That is typical of historic places of worship and reflects the reality that such buildings must evolve if they are to continue serving the communities for which they were built.

Whilst changes have occurred, the church has nevertheless retained those aspects of the building that contribute most strongly to its significance. In particular, it continues to preserve its recognisable ecclesiastical form, its strongly composed and symmetrical principal elevation, its twin towers and central gable, and its clear identity as a historic place of worship. The significance of the building therefore lies not in the fact that it has remained wholly unchanged, but in the survival of its principal architectural character, form and purpose despite the passage of time and the need for adaptation.

This is an important heritage consideration. It demonstrates that the building has historically accommodated change without losing its essential identity, and that carefully justified intervention is consistent with its long-term use and survival.

Existing Constraints

The church is subject to a combination of physical, functional, structural and heritage constraints which significantly limit the range of realistic options available.

These include the limitations imposed by its existing structure and internal volume, the operational requirements of its intended use as a place of worship, and the need to conserve elements of architectural and historic significance.

Any proposals must therefore operate within a constrained context in which both functional requirements and heritage considerations are material.

Physical Constraints

The building is inherently constrained by its existing envelope, width and internal geometry. There is limited scope to create the accommodation now required by the church without making meaningful use of the available internal volume. The building cannot simply expand horizontally, and any solution must work within the confines of the existing structure.

Functional Constraints

The church must operate as more than a single worship room. It is required to function as a living and active church building, capable of accommodating worship, children's provision, teaching and associated church activities. It must also be capable of supporting simultaneous use, which gives rise to the need not only for additional space, but for usable, practical and acoustically separated space.

This is not a matter of convenience or aspiration. It goes directly to whether the building can continue to function effectively for its intended purpose.

Capacity Constraints

The church is also constrained by the need to provide accommodation that comes close to the seating capacity identified in the Statement of Need. As demonstrated through the indicative layouts, more limited or less intrusive floor arrangements would produce a level of accommodation that falls substantially short of what is required. In practical terms, such options would fail to provide a worship space capable of supporting the church's current congregation, anticipated growth, or larger occasional services.

This is a critical point: the issue is not whether a smaller intervention is theoretically possible, but whether it would be fit for purpose. Capacity studies for the church show it would not.

Heritage Constraints

At the same time, the church is clearly a building of heritage significance, and that significance places legitimate limits on the form and extent of intervention. The building is especially sensitive in relation to its principal/front elevation, architectural symmetry, towered composition, external form, and its continued legibility as a church.

However, heritage sensitivity does not mean that the building must remain frozen in its current state regardless of function. Historic churches can only remain viable where they are able to respond to changing patterns of worship and use. The correct heritage question is therefore not whether the building can be left untouched, but whether change can be introduced in a way that is necessary, proportionate and compatible with the retention of significance.

Environmental Performance and Ventilation Constraints

The building is constrained by the absence of openable windows, limiting opportunities for natural ventilation. The proposed use requires accommodation capable of supporting prolonged occupation by large numbers of people throughout the year. Consequently, some form of mechanical ventilation is necessary to ensure acceptable air quality, thermal comfort and compliance with modern operational requirements.

These constraints also present an opportunity to improve the environmental performance of the building through the incorporation of low-carbon technologies and heat recovery systems.

Structural Constraints

The adaptation of the building is further constrained by the character of the existing historic structure, including the masonry walls and any surviving historic fabric and finishes. This limits the range of structural solutions available and means that any intervention must be designed with care to avoid unnecessary damage and ensure that the building continues to perform properly as a historic structure.

Structural Condition and Wall Restraint

The building exhibits evidence of historic outward movement of the side perimeter walls, commonly referred to as wall spreading. This is visible internally, where the width of the building is measurably greater at high level towards the centre of the structure than at lower levels adjacent to the end walls. The extent of this movement is readily apparent and appears to have arisen over a prolonged period.

The likely cause of the movement is the configuration of the historic roof structure. Unlike a fully triangulated roof system, the existing arrangement allows a proportion of roof loads to be transferred laterally to the perimeter walls, creating an outward thrust. Over time, this has resulted in a degree of spreading of the masonry side elevations.

Evidence suggests that this movement ceased many years ago following the installation of horizontal wall tie rods at eaves level across the principal roof bays. These rods act to restrain further outward movement of the walls and form part of the building's established structural history. Their effectiveness is supported by the condition of the side elevations, which were repointed as part of the 1982–83 alteration works and show no evidence of subsequent cracking or movement. This suggests that the walls have remained stable for approximately four decades.

The existing tie rods therefore perform an important structural function and are considered to contribute to the ongoing stability and conservation of the building. They also provide evidence of historic intervention undertaken to address structural movement and form part of the building's evolutionary history.

The proposed insertion of a new first-floor structure has been developed with full regard to these structural constraints. Whilst one existing tie rod will require replacement in order to avoid compromising sightlines within the worship space, the structural restraint function will be retained through the introduction of an alternative scissor-truss arrangement.

In addition, the structural engineer has recommended the introduction of discreet wall restraint measures integrated within the new first-floor structure to provide additional long-term stabilisation of the perimeter walls.

Accordingly, the proposals should be understood not only as an adaptation of the interior to meet contemporary operational requirements, but also as an opportunity to secure the long-term structural stability and conservation of the listed building.

In Summary: The church has undergone change over time, but it continues to retain the principal elements of its architectural and historic significance. At the same time, it is subject to real physical, operational, structural and heritage constraints that materially limit the range of realistic alternatives available.

In this context, the relevant issue is not whether change can be avoided altogether, but whether the necessary change can be accommodated in a way that is proportionate and justified. Properly understood, the current proposal arises from that constrained context and from the need to secure the building's continued and effective use as a living place of worship.

3.0 HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

3.1 Overview of Significance

This section assesses the heritage significance of Baldock Methodist Church in order to establish an informed basis against which the impact of the proposed works can be understood.

For the purposes of this report, **significance** is taken to mean the value of the heritage asset because of its **heritage interest**, including its architectural, historic, evidential and communal interest. The significance of the asset derives not only from its age, architectural treatment and statutory designation, but also from the extent to which its historic character, form, fabric and use remain legible.

As with many historic ecclesiastical buildings, the significance of the church differs across all parts of the asset. Certain elements make a stronger contribution to its special interest than others, and the present significance of the building must therefore be understood in light of both its original design and its subsequent alteration over time.

3.2 Assessment of Significance

Baldock Methodist Church is considered to be a heritage asset of clear architectural, historic and communal significance, reflected in its statutory designation as a Grade II listed building and its location within the Baldock Conservation Area. It is also understood to contribute to the wider historic group value of this part of Whitehorse Street.

In broad terms, the significance of the building appears to derive from:

- its origin as a **purpose-built nineteenth century Nonconformist church**;
- its contribution to the **historic and architectural character** of the street and conservation area;
- the survival of key aspects of its **external architectural composition**;
- the survival, to varying degrees, of elements of **internal form, volume and fabric**;
- its continued and longstanding **communal and associative value** as a place of worship; and
- its evidential value as a building that illustrates both its original ecclesiastical purpose and subsequent adaptation over time.

The church should therefore be understood as a multi-phase historic building whose significance is derived from a combination of built fabric, form, setting and use.



Architectural Interest

The building is considered to possess **moderate to high architectural interest** as a modest but well-composed example of a historic ecclesiastical building, designed in a **Tudor-influenced idiom** and constructed in traditional materials. Its use of red brick with lighter dressings, its vertical front composition, and the presence of ecclesiastical detailing all contribute positively to its architectural character.

Its significance derives not only from the survival of its individual architectural elements, but also from the way in which these elements combine to create a **coherent and intentionally composed façade** of strong visual presence. The front elevation is clearly organised around a **strong central axis**, with matching elements arranged symmetrically to either side.

This formal composition gives the building a sense of **order, dignity and monumentality** appropriate to its original ecclesiastical function.

The principal elevation is of particular significance. Its architectural treatment conveys the building's original religious purpose and gives the structure a clear visual identity within the street. Features such as the principal front window, entrance composition, proportions and roof form appear to make an important contribution to the special interest of the building.

The Gothic-style window openings and tracery are attractive. The front elevation contains a number of pointed-arched window openings, including a large central first floor window with tracery, smaller flanking lancet / pointed-arched windows at lower level and pointed openings within the towers. The small circular opening / oculus above the principal upper window contributes to the architectural enrichment of the façade and helps animate the upper gable.

The external form and silhouette of the church are also significant, including the overall massing and any surviving architectural articulation associated with its original design. These elements contribute not only to the building's individual interest but also to its wider townscape value within the conservation area.

The two tall front towers are among the most visually dominant and architecturally distinctive features of the elevation. They frame the façade and establish a strong vertical emphasis, giving the building a landmark quality and reinforcing its ecclesiastical character. The two tall front towers are among the most visually dominant and architecturally distinctive features of the elevation. They frame the façade and establish a strong vertical emphasis, giving the building a landmark quality and reinforcing its ecclesiastical character.

The main entrance, set centrally beneath a projecting gabled surround, is of clear significance as the ceremonial and functional focus of the façade at ground-floor level. It appears intentionally emphasised within the composition and contributes to the building's sense of arrival and formality. Even if the doors themselves have been altered over time, the position, framing and architectural treatment of the entrance opening are likely to be significant.

Internally, the architectural significance of the building appears to lie less in ornamental richness and more in the expression of ecclesiastical volume, structural form and surviving historic fabric. In particular, the principal internal space, roof structure, spatial hierarchy and any surviving original or early detailing are likely to form an important part of the building's special interest.

At the same time, the present architectural interest of the interior is understood to have been affected by later phases of alteration. Where original plan form, proportions, circulation patterns or visual relationships have been disrupted by later interventions, the architectural legibility of the interior may have been correspondingly diminished.

Historic Interest

The building has clear historic interest as a surviving Victorian Methodist church, illustrating the growth and consolidation of Nonconformist worship and the increasing confidence and permanence of Free Church congregations within market towns such as Baldock.

The church is therefore significant as an expression of the historic development of Baldock and of the role of religious institutions within the town's social and civic life. As a purpose-built place of worship, it has historic value as part of the evolving urban and communal history of Whitehorse Street and the wider conservation area.

The building also possesses historic interest as an example of a heritage asset that has continued to evolve over time. Its significance lies not only in its original Victorian phase, but also in the evidence it provides of changing worship practices, community use and patterns of occupation. In that respect, later adaptations, although not necessarily of equal heritage value, form part of the building's continuing historical narrative.

Townscape Significance

In addition to its architectural interest, the front elevation is likely to be of **considerable townscape significance**. As the formal entrance front, it is the elevation most likely to be experienced publicly and most likely to contribute to the building's role as a **recognisable landmark** within its setting.

The façade's verticality, symmetry and ecclesiastical detailing likely give it a degree of **communal and landmark value**, reflecting the building's long-standing use as a place of worship and its contribution to the identity of the local area.

The church contributes to this urban character by introducing a distinct institutional building type into a street otherwise characterised largely by domestic-scale and commercial frontages. Its siting is also notable in townscape terms: the Baldock Conservation Area Character Statement identifies the Methodist Church as the only building on this part of Whitehorse Street to be set back from the established building line, while noting that its front wall and railings preserve the continuity of the street edge and make an important contribution to the wider street scene.

The appreciation of the church's principal elevation is currently moderated by the presence of a mature yew tree positioned directly in front of the building. Whilst vegetation contributes positively to the setting of the church, the yew obscures important views of the symmetrical façade, towers and principal window, reducing the ability to appreciate the architectural qualities identified within the building's significance. By contrast, the Acacia tree adjacent to the front boundary contributes positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area and forms part of the verdant setting of the church.

Communal and Associative Value

The church has high communal value as a long-established place of worship and gathering within Baldock, with its significance extending beyond its physical fabric to its role in the spiritual, social and community life of the area. This value remains an important aspect of its overall significance, particularly where the building continues to support active worship and community use, contributing to its long-term conservation and meaningful occupation.

Evidential Value

The wall tie rods and associated evidence of historic structural movement form part of the building's evidential value, illustrating both the long-term behaviour of the structure and the measures historically adopted to secure its stability.

The building retains evidential value through its surviving structure, particularly the roof and principal volume. However, this has been reduced by late twentieth-century alterations, which have disrupted the original plan form and spatial relationships. As a result, internal significance is more limited and concentrated in surviving structural elements rather than the current layout.

Contribution of the Interior

The interior of the church makes an important, though not necessarily uniform, contribution to the significance of the asset.

The internal significance derives from a combination of:

- overall spatial volume;
- visual hierarchy and orientation of the principal worship space;
- structural expression;
- natural lighting;
- historic circulation patterns; and
- surviving original or early features and finishes.

In the present case, the principal internal significance is likely to lie in the surviving ecclesiastical volume and any structural or spatial features which continue to express the building's original function and architectural intent. The roof structure and the relationship between the principal front elevation and the main worship volume is of particular importance.

However, the contribution of the interior must also be assessed in light of later interventions. Where the original spatial logic or visual coherence of the interior has been materially altered, the significance of the current internal arrangement may be lower than that of the exterior or of key surviving structural elements.

This is an important distinction for the purposes of the present assessment. It suggests that while the interior plainly contributes to significance, **not all internal fabric or configuration is likely to be of equal heritage sensitivity**, and some elements may already represent later accretions of limited significance.

This point is amplified by the only surviving original internal feature seen at the church. As there are some decorative leaded glass panes currently located behind the platform area at the front of the church - these are thought to have originated from a glazed screen separating the entrance vestibule from the body of the church and may have been relocated during the 1982/83 alterations.

Although relocated from their original position, the panes remain one of the few surviving decorative elements associated with the pre-1982 interior and therefore possess evidential value. They provide a tangible link to the earlier plan form and contribute positively to the understanding of the building's historic development.

Effects of Later Alterations

A proper understanding of the building's significance requires recognition that it has undergone **phases of alteration and adaptation**, including apparently substantial internal change in the late twentieth century.

These later works appear to have affected the original internal plan form and may have reduced the legibility of the historic spatial arrangement. Depending on their nature and extent, they may also have interrupted aspects of the original architectural composition and diminished the quality of the principal worship space as historically conceived.

From a heritage perspective, this is a material consideration. It suggests that the present interior is not wholly intact and that some aspects of significance may already have been compromised or obscured by earlier intervention.

That does not remove significance from the interior, nor does it create a presumption in favour of unrestricted change. However, it does mean that the building's current significance must be assessed as it survives today, rather than on the basis of an assumed fully intact historic interior.

This distinction is important in evaluating the likely impact of the present proposals, particularly where change may affect later fabric or configurations of comparatively limited significance, or where reordering may offer the potential to better reveal surviving elements of greater historic and architectural interest.

3.2.1 Significance Summary

The building's significance is primarily derived from its external architectural composition, townscape contribution and communal use. Internal significance is more limited due to alteration, with greatest value attaching to surviving structural elements.

For the purposes of this assessment, the significance of Baldock Methodist Church can be summarised as follows:

Elements of higher significance

- The **overall listed building**, including its historic ecclesiastical identity and townscape presence;
- The **principal external elevations**, form, materials and architectural composition;
- The building's **historic and communal value** as a long-established place of worship;
- Any surviving **principal internal volume**, structural form and roof structure;
- Surviving **historic fabric and detailing**, including any original or early joinery, glazing and fixtures where present.
- Principal roof structure and surviving historic structural framework

Elements of moderate significance

- The surviving **internal spatial character** and legibility of ecclesiastical use;

- The contribution made by the building's **setting and curtilage** to its appreciation from Whitehorse Street;
- Historic structural interventions, including wall restraint measures that illustrate the building's evolution and ongoing maintenance
- Later historic layers which help illustrate the building's evolving use and adaptation.

Elements of lower or more limited significance

- internal elements or configurations resulting from later remodelling that do not positively contribute to the understanding, legibility or appreciation of the building's special interest;
- fabric or arrangements of limited architectural or historic merit introduced through later alteration.

The church is considered to be a heritage asset of **considerable significance**, deriving its special interest from its strongly articulated ecclesiastical form, symmetrical principal elevation, Gothic-influenced architectural detailing, and its continued legibility as a purpose-built place of worship.

Its significance is expressed both externally, through its form, massing, towers, gables and principal openings, and internally through the spatial character associated with its original religious function. In addition to its architectural and historic interest, the building also possesses substantial communal value as a long-established and active place of worship.

Taken together, these attributes give the church a clear and meaningful heritage significance, whilst also indicating those aspects of the building that are most sensitive to change.

This significance framework provides the basis against which the proposed reconfiguration is assessed in the following sections.

Element	Significance
Principal façade and towers	High
Main worship volume	High
Roof trusses	High
Leaded glass panels	Medium-High
Organ	Medium
Existing 1982 mezzanine/floor structures	Low
Modern partitions	Low
Kitchen and WC fit-out	Negligible

Table 1: Significance hierarchy

3.4 Capacity for Change and Sensitivity to Alteration

Historic churches are amongst the most challenging heritage assets to adapt successfully. Their continued conservation is frequently dependent upon accommodating changing patterns of worship, accessibility requirements, safeguarding obligations and community use. The long-term conservation of such buildings is therefore often best secured through carefully managed adaptation rather than the retention of arrangements that no longer adequately support viable occupation.

General Principles

The church is a building of clear heritage significance, but that significance is uneven across all parts of the building. The church's special interest is concentrated most strongly in its overall form, principal elevation, architectural composition, and continued legibility as an ecclesiastical building, rather than in every element of internal fabric or every aspect of its existing spatial arrangement.

In heritage terms, it is therefore important to distinguish between those aspects of the building that are highly sensitive to change and those areas where the building may be capable of carefully designed and justified adaptation in order to support its viable and sustainable use.

Areas of Greatest Sensitivity

The church is likely to be **most sensitive to change** in relation to those elements that most clearly define its architectural and historic identity. These include:

- the **principal/front elevation**;
- the **symmetrical composition** of the building;
- the **twin towers and their vertical emphasis**;
- the **central gabled arrangement**;
- the **principal entrance and key window openings**;
- the **external silhouette and massing** of the building;
- and any surviving **historic fabric or detailing** of particular architectural quality or evidential value.

Particular sensitivity attaches to the church's historic window openings, including their stone surrounds, mullions and contribution to the perception of internal volume and natural lighting. Any intervention affecting these features should seek to preserve their physical integrity and continued legibility.

Alterations which would materially disrupt or obscure these features would be likely to give rise to a greater degree of heritage harm, as they would affect those aspects of the building that contribute most directly to its significance.

i. Internal Spatial Character and Capacity for Adaptation

The interior of the church is also likely to possess significance, particularly insofar as it reflects the building's original use as a place of worship and retains a sense of **height, openness and collective gathering space**. That said, the significance of the interior should not automatically be understood as precluding all forms of intervention.

In buildings of this kind, internal significance often lies less in the complete absence of subdivision and more in the continued legibility of the building's overall ecclesiastical form and function. It is therefore possible, in principle, for internal alteration to be accommodated without causing unacceptable harm, provided that such change is:

- carefully designed;
- proportionate to the identified need;
- reversible where possible;
- and avoids unnecessary loss of significant fabric or architectural legibility.

This is particularly relevant where adaptation is required to ensure that the building remains usable, viable and capable of supporting its ongoing communal, religious function.

ii. Adaptation as Part of Sustainable Conservation

Historic church buildings often require a degree of internal adaptation if they are to remain in active and meaningful use. In this context, the building's capacity for change must be considered not only in terms of preserving historic fabric, but also in relation to its ability to continue functioning as a place of community use.

Where a building can no longer adequately support the needs of its users without change, a refusal to accommodate any meaningful adaptation can itself place the building's long-term conservation and relevance at risk. For that reason, heritage policy and good conservation practice recognise that sustainable use is often best secured through carefully managed change, rather than through the rigid preservation of existing arrangements irrespective of function.

In the present case, the church's need to accommodate sufficient worship seating and support simultaneous activities across different age groups is not incidental, but goes to the heart of the building's continued purpose and optimum viable use.

iii. Sensitivity of the Interior to a New First Floor

The introduction of a new first floor structure would clearly represent a material intervention within the historic interior and would therefore have some impact on significance, particularly through the alteration of the current perception of internal volume and openness.

The submitted design has been developed specifically to avoid physical intervention within the window openings and to maintain views of the windows from both floor levels. The new floor structure is set back from the perimeter walls and terminates at the wall line rather than extending into the window openings. As a result, the historic windows, mullions and stone surrounds will remain unaffected by the proposed works, whilst retaining a degree of appreciation of the double-height window openings from both above and below.

However, the degree of harm arising from such an intervention depends heavily on how the significance of the building is actually experienced and where it is primarily located.

In this case, the church's significance appears to derive predominantly from:

- its external form and architectural expression;
- the front elevation and principal composition;
- and the broader legibility of the building as a church.

Whilst the internal volume is relevant to that significance, it is not necessarily the case that the entire existing internal openness must remain wholly untouched in order for the building's special interest to continue to be understood and appreciated.

There is therefore a reasonable basis for concluding that the interior has a **limited but genuine capacity for change**, including the insertion of a first floor, provided that the intervention is undertaken in a way that:

- respects the architectural hierarchy of the building;
- avoids unnecessary disruption to significant external expression;
- minimises loss of historic fabric;
- and is demonstrably required to secure the building's functional use.

iv. The Necessity and Alternatives

The building's capacity for change must also be assessed in light of whether the proposed intervention is necessary, and whether less harmful alternatives would realistically meet the same objectives.

Where alternatives (in 4.4.1) have been considered but would fail to deliver the required accommodation, flexibility or acoustic separation, this materially strengthens the justification for the proposed level of intervention. In such circumstances, the assessment is not simply whether change occurs, but whether the minimum necessary level of change is being proposed to secure the building's continued and effective use.

This is an important heritage consideration. A building may have limited sensitivity to a particular form of intervention where that intervention is shown to be:

- functionally essential;
- carefully thought through;
- and less harmful than the consequences of under-provision, poor usability, or long-term obsolescence.

Overall Capacity for Change

Taken as a whole, the church should be understood as having a moderate capacity for internal change, albeit with high sensitivity in relation to its principal architectural and external characteristics.

High sensitivity

- front elevation;
- symmetry and architectural composition;
- towers, gables and principal openings;
- external form and landmark presence;
- important surviving historic detailing and fabric.

Moderate sensitivity

- internal volume and openness;
- internal spatial hierarchy;
- historic internal relationships where they remain legible.

Greater capacity for change

- internal arrangements where intervention can be accommodated without substantial loss of significant fabric;
- new insertions required to support viable and sustainable worship/community use;
- interventions that are clearly justified by need and carefully integrated into the building.

The church is considered to possess a meaningful but not unlimited capacity for change. Its highest significance lies in its external architectural form, principal elevation, symmetry, vertical emphasis and overall ecclesiastical identity, all of which are highly sensitive to alteration. By contrast, whilst the interior and its sense of volume contribute to significance, they are not necessarily so sensitive as to preclude all forms of internal adaptation.

In principle, the building is capable of accommodating carefully designed internal intervention, provided such change is proportionate, justified by clear operational need, and undertaken in a manner that avoids unnecessary harm to the building's key heritage attributes. In this respect, a degree of internal change may be necessary in order to secure the church's continued and optimum viable use as an active place of worship and community facility.

4.0 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.1 Proposed alterations in relation to architectural and historic character

This section assesses the likely effect of the proposed works on the heritage significance of Baldock Methodist Church, having regard to the significance identified in Section 3 and the nature of the proposals presented in the report.

The assessment considers the impact of the scheme on the building as a Grade II listed heritage asset, including its architectural, historic, evidential and communal significance, together with its contribution to the Baldock Conservation Area and wider townscape.

In undertaking this assessment, it is important to recognise that the significance of the building is not evenly distributed across all parts of the asset. Certain elements — including the principal external composition, surviving ecclesiastical form, structural character and communal value — make a stronger contribution to significance than later fabric or arrangements of more limited historic or architectural interest.

The key question is therefore not whether the building would change — as change is clearly proposed — but whether that change would preserve, diminish or enhance those aspects of the asset that contribute most materially to its significance, and whether any resulting degree of harm is justified and proportionate in heritage terms.

Overview of Proposed Works

- internal reordering
- mezzanine / first floor
- stair / lift
- partitions
- rooflights
- rear fire escape
- curtilage works

4.2 Design Approach

Objectives

The design approach appears to be based on the principle of **adaptive reuse through contemporary but subservient intervention**, seeking to accommodate the functional needs of the building's intended use while retaining and responding to those features considered to contribute positively to its heritage significance.

This is reflected in the apparent intention to:

- retain selected features of architectural and historic value;
- organise new accommodation largely within the existing envelope of the building;
- introduce new elements in a legible contemporary manner rather than through pastiche replication; and
- balance practical adaptation with a degree of heritage sensitivity.

The acceptability of this approach in heritage terms will depend not simply on the broad design intent, but on the detailed relationship between the new interventions and the significance of the existing building, as assessed in the following section.

Summary

In summary, the proposed works comprise a significant programme of **internal adaptation and reordering**, together with limited associated external alterations, intended to secure the building's continued and enhanced use as a place of worship and community facility.

The proposals include the insertion of new accommodation, revised circulation, accessibility improvements, structural adaptation and associated remodelling. While the broad objective is to improve the building's functionality, the works have the potential to affect aspects of the building's significance and therefore require careful assessment in heritage terms.

4.2.1 Retention and Change

Elements to be Retained

The proposal retains the principal historic form, envelope and key character-defining fabric of the former church. Most importantly, the building's overall external massing, roof form, twin-turreted principal façade, side wall elevations, and pointed-arch window pattern are all retained, thereby preserving the building's established ecclesiastical presence and legibility within the streetscape. The existing front entrance doors are also shown as being retained and refurbished rather than replaced.

Internally, the scheme retains the main volume and proportions of the worship space, together with important surviving historic features including the decorative roof structure / arches, the existing stained-glass panel(s), and the historic pew retained at first floor level. The drawings also indicate retention of the six existing structural columns, which continue to express the historic structural rhythm of the space.

Elements to be Changed

The principal change is the insertion of a new mezzanine / first floor structure across the main body of the church, creating a new upper-level sanctuary and a series of ground-floor classrooms, lobby and ancillary accommodation beneath. This materially alters the historic internal volume and introduces a new horizontal subdivision within what is presently a more open worship space.

Associated alterations include:

- I. insertion of a new internal stair and platform lift for accessibility;
- II. formation of a new rear first floor fire exit opening and installation of a new external metal escape stair;
- III. insertion of new rooflights;
- IV. introduction of new glazed screens, balustrades and fire-rated glass internally;
- V. reconfiguration of internal fittings, sanitary accommodation and circulation.

Overall Summary

In summary, the proposal retains the principal external character and selected significant internal features, but introduces a substantial new internal intervention in order to support the building's continued and intensified use. The scheme therefore represents selective

retention combined with major internal adaptation, rather than wholesale loss of historic character.

4.3 Existing Interior Elements Affected by the Proposals

The proposed works would affect a number of specific elements of the existing interior, although the extent and heritage sensitivity of those elements varies. In assessing impact, it is important to distinguish between areas of surviving historic significance, later fabric of lesser significance, and aspects of the interior that are affected principally in spatial or visual terms rather than through direct material loss.

The principal interior elements affected by the proposals are understood to include:

- the existing internal volume and sense of openness within the main body of the church;
- the present visual relationship between the lower and upper parts of the interior;
- the front portion of the building currently altered by the 1982/83 insertion and subdivision;
- the existing later partitions, ancillary rooms and staircase within the front section;
- the full-height masonry dividing wall inserted in 1982/83;
- the current relationship between the principal front window and the interior;
- the present internal circulation pattern and routes between entrance, ancillary accommodation and worship space;
- localised areas of historic wall fabric and finishes where structural bearings and associated support works would be required;
- the visual setting and appreciation of surviving decorative roof trusses / arches and other structural elements;
- localised areas associated with the insertion of the new stair, platform lift and first floor landing; and
- localised areas affected by new internal partitions, glazed screens and associated fire / acoustic separation measures.

Not all of these elements contribute equally to the significance of the listed building. Some, including the later subdivisions and walling inserted in 1982/83, are themselves products of relatively recent alteration and are considered to make only a limited contribution to the building's special interest. Others — particularly the principal internal volume, structural roof form, surviving historic openings and overall ecclesiastical legibility of the space — are more sensitive in heritage terms.

The principal heritage effects of the proposals therefore arise less from wholesale loss of historic fabric, and more from the extent to which the works would alter the surviving spatial character, visual relationships and legibility of the church interior.

Interior Elements to be Removed

The proposed works include the removal of a number of internal elements associated principally with the 1982/83 reordering of the building. These are understood to include:

- the existing first floor insertion within the front part of the building;
- later internal partitions and enclosed ancillary rooms;
- the existing staircase and associated circulation enclosure;
- the full-height masonry dividing wall between the front section and the principal worship space; and
- associated later fittings, finishes and service elements required to facilitate the revised layout.

In heritage terms, these removals are not considered to result in substantial loss of high-significance historic fabric. On the contrary, they would remove elements of later intervention that have already disrupted aspects of the building's original internal coherence and visual legibility. Their removal therefore has the potential to result in a limited degree of heritage benefit, or at least to offset part of the harm associated with the new intervention.

Elements to be Removed	Elements to be Retained
1982/83 insertions	Façade
Later partitions	Roof trusses
Full-height wall	Structural columns
Staircase	Stained / leaded glass
Later fittings etc.	Doors & Key form / openings

Table 2: Proposed interventions

4.4 Assessment of Proposed Works

A. INTERNAL WORKS

The existing arrangement provides a fragmented and operationally constrained internal layout, with limited visual and functional integration between the principal spaces. The proposed works therefore seek to establish a clearer spatial hierarchy, centred around a principal worship area supported by a range of ancillary accommodation.

The intention of the internal reordering is to create a building layout that is capable of supporting both formal worship and the broader programme of church/ community activity.

Mezzanine / First floor Insertion

The proposals include the introduction of **additional internal floor area**, in the form of a **mezzanine or new upper-level floor structure** within part of the building. This element is intended to increase the amount of usable accommodation available within the existing building envelope and to provide additional ancillary space without requiring a more extensive external extension.

All of the first floor would be the worship sanctuary, except for a small landing area where the staircase and platform lift terminate.

This intervention is expected to require:

- insertion of a new structural floor;
- associated structural support works, including new joists or structural members;
- adaptation of existing internal walls or openings where necessary to accommodate the new arrangement;
- Insertion of rooflight windows to provide additional daylight and the option of passive ventilation to the worship sanctuary
- corresponding changes to circulation, access and enclosure.

The insertion of additional floor area is likely to be one of the more significant physical interventions within the scheme, given its potential to affect the perception of internal volume, visual relationships and the legibility of the building's historic interior.

Relationship of the New First Floor to Historic Windows

The proposed first-floor structure has been carefully designed to minimise its impact upon the historic window openings and to preserve the architectural significance of the side elevations.

The structural beams supporting the new floor are set back approximately 400mm from the perimeter walls. This arrangement creates a chamfered underside to the floor edge where it approaches the windows, reducing the visual impact of the floor structure and preventing an abrupt intersection with the window openings.

Importantly, the new floor terminates at the internal wall line and does not extend into the window openings themselves. As a result, the historic windows, stone surrounds and mullions remain entirely unaffected by the proposed works, aside from any necessary repair and redecoration works associated with their ongoing conservation.

The proposals represent a notable improvement upon the existing arrangement. At present, the existing first-floor structure intersects three window openings and views of these windows are further obscured by substantial dark timber balustrades. Under the proposed scheme, these balustrades will be removed and replaced with 1100mm high glass safety balustrades fixed to the walls either side of the openings. This approach will significantly improve visibility of the windows whilst maintaining the necessary safety standards.

Secondary glazing is proposed at ground-floor level. This will comprise discreet timber-framed units fixed within the window reveals. The units will be designed to slide open to allow maintenance and cleaning and will be detailed so that their central mullions align with the existing mullions, thereby minimising their visibility from the exterior. In addition to improving thermal performance, the secondary glazing will provide an acoustic barrier that is necessary to facilitate the simultaneous use of the ground and first floors.

Taken together, these measures ensure that the historic windows remain physically untouched by the new floor structure and continue to be appreciated from both floor levels. The design preserves the legibility of the double-height window openings whilst improving their visibility when compared with the existing arrangement. Consequently, the heritage impact arising from the interface between the new floor and the historic windows is considered to be low and is substantially mitigated through careful design.

Wall Tie Rods and Structural Stabilisation

The church has experienced historic lateral movement of the perimeter walls, resulting in measurable wall spreading. Evidence indicates that this movement ceased following the installation of internal tie rods at eaves level, and there is no indication of continued movement since the side elevations were repointed in 1982/83.

The proposed first-floor insertion necessitates removal of the existing tie rod nearest the raised platform in order to avoid interruption of important sightlines within the worship space. To maintain structural stability, the rod will be replaced by a scissor truss arrangement formed from members of matching material, diameter and finish.

In addition, the structural engineer has recommended the introduction of concealed restraint ties within the new first-floor structure, terminating externally in pattress plates positioned between existing window openings. These measures are required to secure the long-term stability of the perimeter walls and reduce the risk of future movement.

Whilst the introduction of pattress plates and replacement structural members will result in a limited degree of alteration to the historic fabric, the works are principally driven by structural necessity and the conservation of the building.

The interventions are modest in scale, located to minimise visual impact, and will secure the long-term preservation of the listed structure. Consequently, any heritage harm is considered to be negligible and substantially outweighed by the conservation benefits arising from the stabilisation of the building.

Heating, Cooling and Ventilation Systems

The proposals include the introduction of a comprehensive heating, cooling and ventilation strategy intended to improve the environmental performance, comfort and long-term sustainability of the building whilst supporting its continued use as an active place of worship and community facility.

Heating and Cooling

A hybrid heating system is proposed. An Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP), located within the front forecourt in a position selected to minimise visual prominence, will provide a baseline level of heating and cooling to the first-floor accommodation. During periods of particularly

cold weather, a supplementary gas boiler located within the WC area will provide additional heating capacity. Heat distribution will be achieved through a combination of fan-assisted radiators and ceiling-mounted air distribution vents.

The first-floor radiators will be supplied by vertical pipework rising through the new first-floor structure. This approach has been adopted in order to avoid the introduction of horizontal pipe runs across window openings and to minimise interference with the existing historic fabric. The ground floor will be heated by the gas boiler through the provision of new radiators.

From a heritage perspective, the proposed heating installations have been designed to minimise their visual and physical impact upon the listed building. The boiler will be accommodated internally within an area of comparatively limited heritage significance, whilst associated pipework has been carefully routed to avoid unnecessary disruption to historic fabric and architectural features. Although the Air Source Heat Pump introduces a new external element within the curtilage of the church, its location has been selected to minimise its visibility and avoid competition with the principal architectural features of the building.

The introduction of the hybrid heating system will significantly improve the energy efficiency of the building and reduce its overall carbon footprint. This represents a positive enhancement in sustainability terms and supports the long-term viable use and conservation of the heritage asset.

Mechanical Ventilation

The building currently lacks openable windows and therefore offers very limited opportunities for natural ventilation. As a result, the proposed use requires the introduction of mechanical ventilation systems to provide acceptable levels of air quality, thermal comfort and environmental control.

At ground-floor level, mechanical ventilation is proposed to serve the hall and classroom accommodation. The system will comprise fans and ductwork fixed to the underside of the new first-floor structure, with external louvres positioned on the rear elevation. Heat recovery equipment will be incorporated within the system to improve energy efficiency and reduce operational energy demand. Separate extraction systems are proposed for the kitchen and WC facilities.

At first-floor level, opening rooflights will provide some natural ventilation. However, these are not capable of delivering reliable year-round ventilation, particularly during colder periods of the year. Consequently, a mechanical ventilation system is proposed, comprising fans and ductwork located principally within the roof void, together with ceiling-mounted ventilation grilles. Existing louvres on the front and rear elevations will be utilised wherever possible to minimise the need for additional external openings. As with the ground-floor system, heat recovery equipment will be incorporated to improve environmental performance.

The heritage impact of these installations is considered to be limited. The majority of ductwork, plant and associated equipment will be concealed within the roof void, beneath the new first-floor structure, or within service areas already subject to substantial alteration. The proposals avoid significant intervention to the principal historic spaces and seek to utilise existing openings where possible. As a result, the effect on the architectural character and significance of the listed building is considered to be minimal.

Roof Void Access

In order to facilitate the installation, inspection and long-term maintenance of the proposed ventilation systems, access to the roof void is required. This will be achieved through the formation of a new ceiling access hatch.

Whilst the access hatch represents a minor intervention within the existing fabric, it is small in scale and required to ensure the effective operation and maintenance of the building's environmental systems. The proposal will not materially affect the significance, character or appreciation of the historic interior and will therefore result in low heritage impact.

Heritage Assessment

Overall, the proposed heating, cooling and ventilation strategy introduces a number of necessary modern building services required to secure the building's continued occupation and sustainable operation. The interventions have been carefully designed to minimise impacts on historic fabric, utilise existing openings where possible, and concentrate new services within areas of lower heritage sensitivity.

The resulting heritage impact is considered to be low and, in places, negligible. This limited impact is outweighed by the substantial operational, environmental and sustainability benefits arising from improved thermal comfort, enhanced air quality, reduced carbon emissions and the long-term viability of the church as a place of worship and community use.

Internal Reordering, Partitions and Spatial Change

The proposed scheme includes the introduction and/or reconfiguration of **internal partitions and enclosed rooms** in order to create a range of ancillary accommodation necessary for the building's intended use.

These elements are primarily intended to improve the building's practical usability and flexibility and to support a wider range of simultaneous activities within the church.

Depending on the detailed design, such works may include a combination of solid and/or glazed partitioning, together with associated doors, screens and internal finishes. Contemporary interventions of this kind are understood to form part of the design approach, including features such as **glazed partitions and contemporary internal detailing**, where required.

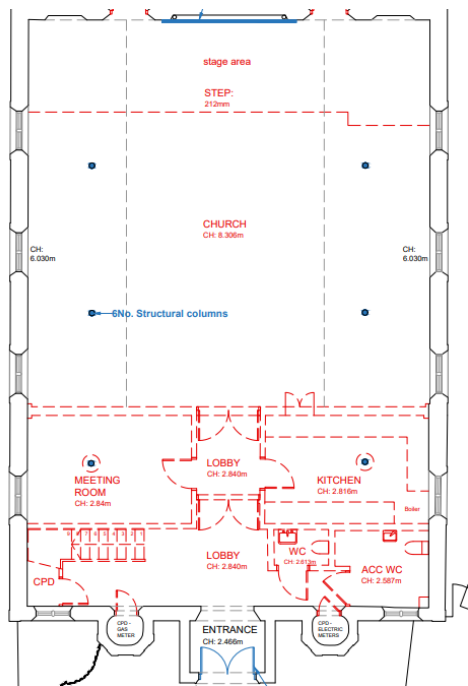


Figure 2: Elements to be removed

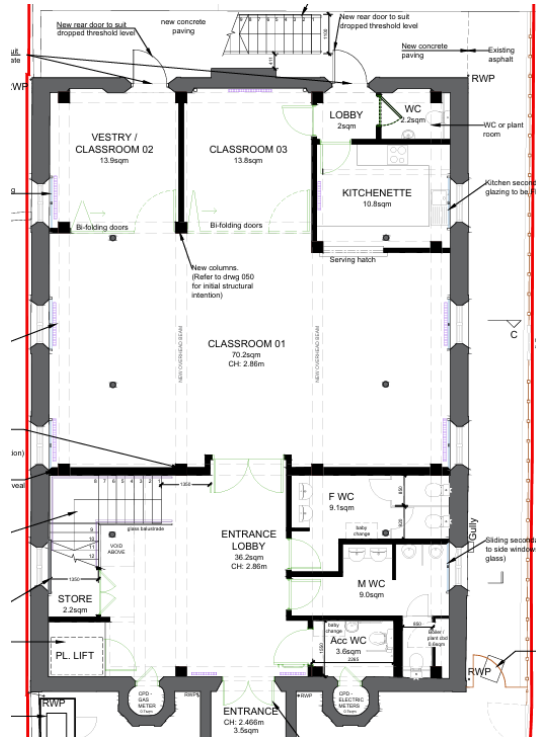
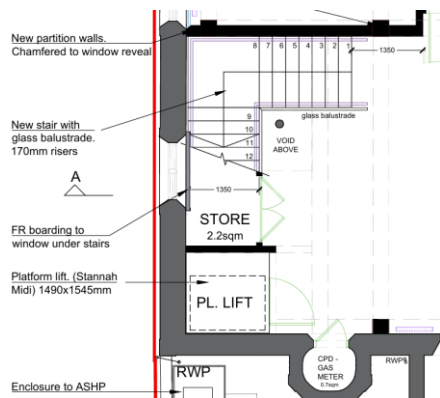
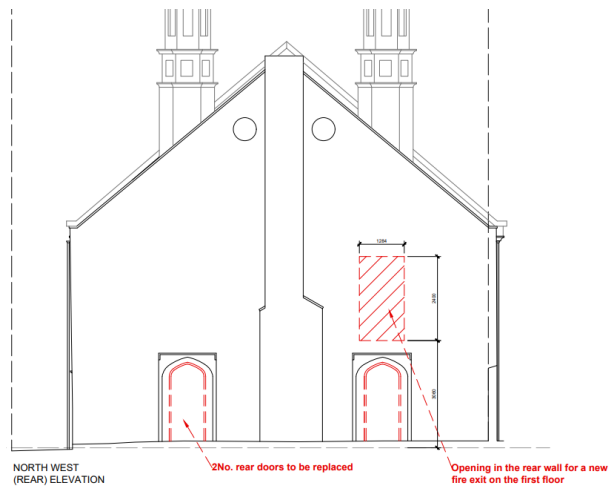


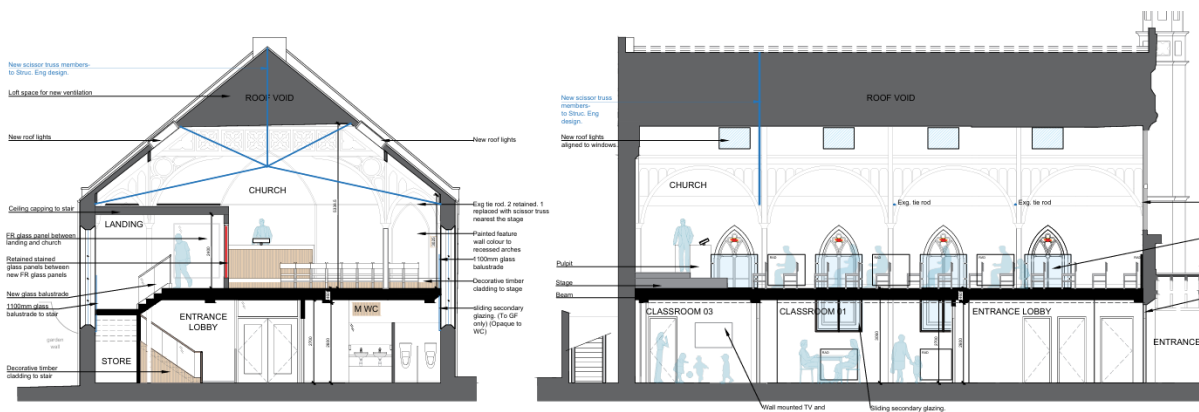
Figure 3: New partitions and lobby area, showing lift and rear fire escape



First floor lift and ne stair



Fire escape detail



Mezzanine floor sections

Lift, Stair and Accessibility Works

The proposals include works intended to improve **internal accessibility and circulation**, in order to support a more inclusive and functional arrangement across the building.

As presently understood, this is likely to include:

- provision of improved step-free access within the building;
- introduction of new or revised stairs;
- installation of a **platform lift or other vertical circulation provision** to facilitate access to upper-level accommodation; This will be located in the front corner:
- improved routes between principal and ancillary spaces;
- revised circulation patterns intended to support safer and more efficient movement through the building.

These measures form an important part of the overall scheme and are intended to ensure that the reconfigured building is capable of functioning as an accessible place of worship and community use.

Retention and Reuse of Historic Leaded Glass Panels

The proposals include the retention and incorporation of the surviving decorative leaded glass panes currently located behind the raised platform. These panes are understood to have originated from the former glazed screen that historically separated the entrance vestibule from the principal worship space prior to the alterations undertaken in 1982/83.

Rather than being removed or placed in storage, the panes will be integrated within the new circulation core walls at first-floor level, allowing them to remain visible and legible as historic elements within the building. This approach ensures the continued retention of one of the few surviving decorative features associated with the earlier interior whilst enabling it to contribute positively to the new arrangement.

From a heritage perspective, the proposal represents a beneficial treatment of surviving historic fabric. The relocation of the panes within the circulation core will preserve their material significance, maintain their visibility to building users and assist in communicating

aspects of the building's historic development. The proposal therefore results in a heritage benefit through the retention and continued appreciation of a feature of evidential and architectural interest.

Structural Intervention and Impact on Fabric

The reconfiguration proposals necessarily involve a degree of **selective alteration to the existing internal fabric** in order to facilitate the revised plan form and structural arrangement.

The works include the removal of the 1982/83 structure including all rooms and the staircase which presently occupies the front third portion of the church. This will require:

- selective removal or alteration of internal walls and partitions;
- insertion of structural supports and joists;
- formation or modification of internal openings;
- localised alterations to floors, ceilings and enclosure;
- associated building works required to integrate new accommodation and circulation routes.

The detailed extent of such interventions will be material to the heritage assessment, particularly where they may affect surviving historic fabric, the legibility of the original internal arrangement, or the appreciation of significant internal volume and structure.

At the same time, the proposals seek retention of certain features considered to be of heritage value, including elements such as **stained glass and the historic front door**, where these can be conserved and incorporated within the reconfigured scheme.

Rooflights and External Escape Stair

Although the principal focus of the scheme is internal reconfiguration, the proposals also include a number of **associated external works**.

These include:

- alterations connected with access and means of escape;
- introduction of an **external fire escape stair** at the rear of the church for emergency exit purposes only
- related works to the external envelope and/or curtilage where necessary to facilitate the proposed use and circulation arrangements.
- 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 reduction of existing mature trees; together with the installation of a new church sign and the restoration of the boundary railings and gates.

Any such external interventions are likely to require careful heritage consideration due to their potential effect on the building's principal elevations, setting and contribution to the conservation area.

Justification for a New Mezzanine Floor

Assessment of Alternatives and Minimum Necessary Intervention

The proposed mezzanine floor is considered necessary to meet the church's identified operational and worship needs. The church's Statement of Need establishes a requirement for a worship sanctuary capable of accommodating approximately 170 persons. This reflects not only the current congregation of around 110 attendees, but also realistic future growth, particularly among young families and newcomers, as well as the periodic use of the building for larger occasions such as weddings, baptisms and funerals.

Indicative seating studies demonstrate that a wall-to-wall first floor arrangement is the most practical option capable of approaching this requirement. This layout would provide seating for approximately 156 chairs, together with a retained historic pew seating a further 6 persons, giving an overall capacity of around 162 seats. Although this falls slightly short of the stated requirement, it remains the only arrangement capable of delivering a functional sanctuary of sufficient scale.

By contrast, alternative layouts involving setbacks from the perimeter walls would significantly reduce capacity and fail to meet the church's needs. A scheme incorporating an approximate 1 metre gap around the side and front elevations would reduce seating capacity to around 102 persons, while a layout aligned more closely with the existing iron columns would reduce capacity to approximately 78 persons. Such arrangements would be wholly inadequate for both current and anticipated future use.

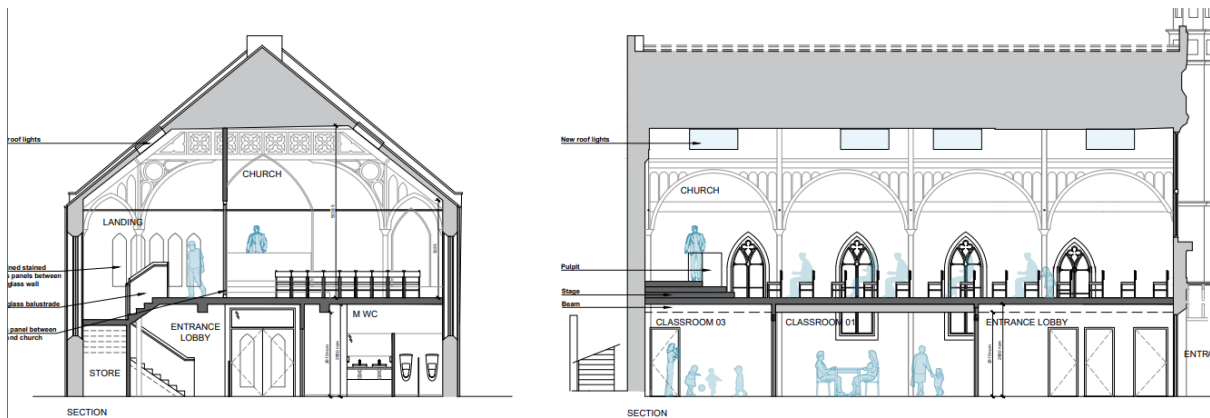
A further key consideration is the need for acoustic separation between the ground and first floors to enable simultaneous use. The proposed arrangement is intended to allow worship, teaching, crèche provision, and children's activities to take place concurrently. In this context, a continuous floorplate is necessary to minimise noise transfer and ensure both levels can function effectively.

Alternative approaches involving glazed floor areas have also been considered but discounted due to concerns relating to privacy, modesty, user comfort and practicality.

Overall, it is concluded that the proposed wall-to-wall mezzanine is essential to the viable and sustainable use of the building. Any resulting heritage harm is outweighed by the substantial public and communal benefits arising from the church's continued and enhanced use as an active place of worship and community facility.



Figure XYZ : Existing section of volume



Proposed mezzanine

Impact of the Proposed Wall-to-Wall First Floor on Significance

Scope for Mitigation and Refinement

The proposed wall-to-wall first floor would represent a significant intervention within the historic interior of the church and would therefore result in a degree of heritage harm. That harm would arise principally through the alteration of the building's current internal spatial character, in particular the reduction in the sense of openness, height and vertical unity presently experienced within the church.

The main effect of the proposal would therefore be on the interior, where the insertion of a continuous floor would interrupt the perception of the church as a single-volume worship space. This would reduce the extent to which the original internal volume can be appreciated in one view and would alter part of the building's historic spatial character.

However, the significance of the church does not derive solely from its internal openness. As set out above, its significance lies more strongly in its:

- overall ecclesiastical form and massing;
- symmetrical principal elevation;
- twin towers, central gable and principal openings;
- architectural character and external composition; and
- continued use as a place of worship.

The proposal would not remove or fundamentally alter these key attributes.

In particular, whilst the church's front elevation is of high significance, the proposed first floor would not fundamentally compromise its architectural integrity. The principal external features of the façade, including the towers, central gable, entrance, upper window, symmetry and silhouette, would remain legible and intact. The effect on the significance of the front elevation is therefore considered to be limited, with the principal impact instead falling on the internal experience of the building.

More broadly, the proposal would not alter the building's essential form, identity or legibility as a church. The building would remain clearly recognisable as a historic ecclesiastical structure and, importantly, would continue to function in a manner consistent with its historic purpose.

The harm arising from the proposal is therefore considered to consist principally of:

- the partial loss of the present internal sense of openness and volume; and
- some reduction in the ability to appreciate the church as a single uninterrupted interior space.

However, the proposal would not result in the loss of the church's principal façade, defining architectural features, overall external form, or its continued ecclesiastical use. For that reason, the harm identified would affect part only of the building's significance and is therefore considered to amount to less than substantial harm in heritage terms.

That harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this case, the wall-to-wall first floor is considered necessary to provide accommodation capable of approaching the seating capacity identified in the Statement of Need, to support the church's existing and future congregation, and to ensure appropriate acoustic separation between simultaneous activities on the ground and first floors. Alternative and less intrusive options have been considered but would not meet these operational requirements.

Accordingly, whilst the proposal would cause a degree of heritage harm, that harm is considered to be less than substantial and is clearly outweighed by the public and functional benefits arising from the continued viable and effective use of the building as a place of worship.

Impact on Fabric

The principal direct impact on historic fabric arising from the proposed mezzanine would be the need to insert structural steelwork into the existing masonry walls. This would involve localised cutting into historic fabric to form beam bearings and may result in some loss of masonry, mortar, plaster and other finishes. Such works would give rise to a degree of heritage harm in fabric and evidential terms.

However, this impact can be materially mitigated through a conservation-led structural approach, including minimising the number and extent of wall penetrations, locating bearings in areas of lower significance and avoiding decorative or architecturally important fabric.

It is also possible to spread structural loads appropriately, using breathable and compatible making-good materials and undertaking detailed opening-up and recording prior to final installation. On that basis, the impact on historic fabric can be reduced to the minimum necessary to facilitate the proposal.

Assessment of Alternatives / Why Less Harmful Options Are Not Realistic

In heritage terms, it is necessary to consider whether the church's needs could be met through less harmful alternatives to the proposed wall-to-wall first floor. These have been considered, but none would provide a practical or effective solution.

A reduced-footprint or set-back first floor would retain more openness and lessen visual impact, but would also result in a significant loss of usable floor area. Indicative layouts show that such arrangements would reduce seating capacity to approximately 102 seats, or as few as 78 seats in a more restricted form. These figures fall substantially short of the capacity required by the Statement of Need and would not adequately serve the church's existing congregation, anticipated growth, or occasional larger services.

Likewise, an arrangement that retained a greater degree of internal openness would fail to provide the necessary acoustic separation between the ground and first floors. The building is intended to support simultaneous uses, including worship, creche provision, Sunday School and adult activities. A more open layout would increase the likelihood of noise interference and would therefore undermine the effective functioning of the building.

The use of glazed or transparent floor areas has also been considered. However, this is not considered suitable in the context of the church's intended use, due to concerns relating to privacy, modesty and user comfort, particularly where both floors may be occupied at the same time.

Whilst alternative structural or design refinements may help reduce certain aspects of impact, they do not alter the central point that, in order to achieve the required capacity and acoustic separation, the first floor must extend across the available footprint in a meaningful way.

Accordingly, it is concluded that **less harmful options have been explored but would not meet the identified operational needs of the church**. The proposed wall-to-wall first floor is therefore considered to represent a **viable intervention** capable of supporting the building's continued and functional use.

B. EXTERNAL WORKS: HERITAGE JUSTIFICATION

The proposed external works comprise a limited and functionally necessary package of interventions associated with **access, means of escape, circulation and repair**, required to support the continued and viable use of the church as an active place of worship and community facility.

Access, Means of Escape and Circulation

The proposed alterations associated with **access and means of escape** are considered necessary to ensure that the building can function safely, effectively and inclusively in accordance with its intended use. Historic buildings in continued public use frequently require a degree of adaptation in order to accommodate modern expectations in relation to emergency egress, accessibility, safeguarding and practical circulation.

In this case, such works are directly linked to the building's **continued beneficial use**, and should therefore be understood as essential enabling works rather than discretionary additions. Provided they are designed and executed in a subordinate manner, they are considered capable of being accommodated without material harm to the building's principal heritage significance.

External Fire Escape Stair

There is an essential need to provide an external first floor fire exit and external fire escape staircase - for the proposal to meet Building/Fire regulations *but 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 proposed external fire escape stair, located to the rear of the church and intended for emergency exit purposes only, is considered to be a justified and proportionate intervention in order to secure safe means of escape from the reconfigured building.

Its location to the rear is significant in heritage terms, as it avoids direct impact on the building's principal public elevation and therefore limits harm to the most architecturally expressive and publicly prominent part of the listed building. The rear elevation is of comparatively lower sensitivity in townscape and architectural terms, and is better able to accommodate a necessary functional addition of this kind.

Subject to detailed design, the stair should be simple, lightweight and visually recessive in appearance, such that it reads as a **clearly contemporary but subordinate intervention**. On that basis, while the stair would introduce a degree of change, it is considered to give rise to only **limited heritage harm**, justified by its clear life-safety function and contribution to the building's continued viable use.

Related Works to the External Envelope and Curtilage

Any associated works to the **external envelope and/or curtilage** are similarly considered acceptable in principle where they are necessary to facilitate access, circulation, emergency egress and the practical operation of the building.

Provided such works are carefully detailed, avoid unnecessary disturbance to significant historic fabric, and remain visually subordinate to the architectural character of the church, they are unlikely to result in material harm to the building's significance or its contribution to the conservation area.

Cleaning and Restoration of the Façade

The proposed **cleaning and restoration works to the building façade** are supported in heritage terms and are likely to result in a clear conservation benefit, provided they are undertaken using appropriate repair principles and conservative methodology.

The principal elevation makes an important contribution to the significance of the listed building and to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Works which seek to repair, conserve and improve the legibility of the façade are therefore considered beneficial, particularly where they address weathering, deterioration or visual decline.

Such works should be based on the principles of **minimum intervention, like-for-like repair, and the gentlest effective cleaning method**, with materials and detailing matched appropriately to the existing historic fabric. Subject to that approach, the façade works are considered to represent a positive heritage outcome.

Forecourt Trees and Enhancement of the Setting

The proposals include the removal of the yew tree situated immediately in front of the church. The tree currently obscures views of the principal elevation and limits appreciation of the building's architectural composition, including the symmetrical façade, twin towers, central gable and principal traceried window. Its removal would improve visibility of the listed building from Whitehorse Street and allow fuller appreciation of its architectural and townscape significance.

Removal of the tree is also required to facilitate the modest enlargement of the paved forecourt area associated with the proposed use of the building. In addition, nearly all parts of the yew tree are poisonous. Given the intended occupation of the building by a wide range of users, including children and potentially vulnerable persons, its removal provides a practical management and safety benefit.

The tree is not protected by an individual or group Tree Preservation Order and its removal would not result in the loss of a feature identified as making a significant contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building.

The proposals also include arboricultural works to the mature Acacia tree located immediately behind the front railings. Whilst the tree makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, it has previously been subject to unsympathetic pruning and has responded through the development of a secondary crown formed of regrowth. The proposed works would comprise careful reprofiling in accordance with professional arboricultural advice, with the objective of improving the tree's long-term health, appearance and contribution to the setting of the church.

Overall, the proposed tree works are considered to result in a heritage benefit through improved appreciation of the listed building and enhancement of the quality of its immediate setting.

Overall Assessment

Taken together, the proposed external works are considered to comprise a **necessary and proportionate package of enabling and conservation-led interventions**. While they

would introduce a degree of change, particularly through the addition of the rear escape stair, that change is limited in scope and is justified by the practical requirements of safe occupation, continued use and long-term stewardship of the listed building.

On balance, the external works are considered to be **acceptable in heritage terms**, and consistent with the objective of securing the building's continued viable use while preserving its special interest as far as reasonably possible.

4.5 General Heritage Effects of the Scheme

The proposals would result in a material intervention to the building, primarily affecting the interior through changes to plan form, spatial organisation and structure. The extent of heritage impact depends on how these works affect elements of higher significance relative to later or less sensitive fabric.

Assessment is based on the building as it currently exists, recognising the extent of previous alteration.

4.5.1 Impact on External Form, Elevations and Townscape Character

Principal effect

The proposals are largely internal, with limited external change. The building's form, architectural composition and identity as a nineteenth-century ecclesiastical structure would remain legible. Its contribution to Whitehorse Street and the conservation area would therefore be preserved.

Potential areas of sensitivity

External works, including new openings, escape provision and boundary alterations, could affect:

- architectural coherence;
- visual integrity; and
- the building's contribution to the street scene.

These impacts can be mitigated through careful design and detailing.

Assessment

External impact is likely to be limited, subject to design resolution.

4.5.2 Impact on Internal Plan Form and Spatial Character

Existing significance

The interior contributes through spatial form, structure and ecclesiastical legibility, though already affected by late twentieth-century alteration.

Effect of the proposals

The scheme introduces substantial reordering, including new accommodation, circulation changes and a mezzanine. This would alter the existing arrangement and reduce its legibility.

Potential effects include:

- reduced spatial hierarchy;
- diminished openness;
- altered relationships between spaces; and
- reduced evidential clarity.

Balancing consideration

The current arrangement is itself the product of significant alteration and is not uniformly sensitive.

Assessment

The proposals would result in a moderate level of impact, representing a material but targeted intervention within an already altered interior.

4.5.3 Impact on Internal Volume and Spatial Legibility

Significance of volume

Internal volume and verticality are key to ecclesiastical character.

Effect of mezzanine

The mezzanine would:

- reduce perceived openness;
- interrupt views;
- alter spatial hierarchy; and
- affect structural legibility.

Mitigating factors

Impact will depend on design. A lightweight, recessive intervention may reduce harm, particularly where the current arrangement already compromises spatial clarity.

Assessment

This is likely to result in a moderate to moderately high level of impact and represents a principal source of heritage harm.

4.5.4 Impact on Roof Structure and Principal Internal Features

Existing significance

The roof structure is a key element of architectural and evidential significance.

Effect of the proposals

Impacts may be:

- adverse, where obscured or dominated; or
- beneficial, where better revealed.

Assessment

The outcome is design-dependent and finely balanced. Proposals should:

- retain visibility of key structural elements;

- avoid visual competition; and
- seek opportunities to enhance legibility.

4.5.5 Impact on Historic Fabric

The proposals involve a moderate to high degree of internal intervention, while retaining the principal external envelope and key elements of significance.

External alterations are limited and would not materially alter the building's established character. Internally, the introduction of the mezzanine and associated works would alter spatial character but retain key features, including roof structure, glazing and structural elements.

Overall

Heritage impact arises primarily from spatial change rather than extensive loss of historic fabric.

Sustainability

The proposals include a comprehensive environmental upgrade through the introduction of low-carbon heating technology and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery. Whilst these measures necessitate limited interventions to historic fabric, they improve the sustainability, comfort and long-term viability of the building, thereby supporting its continued occupation and conservation.

4.5.6 Heritage Impact of the Proposed Lift

The lift represents a localised intervention affecting circulation and limited fabric. Its impact is mitigated by its siting within a secondary space and the retention of key features.

The provision of step-free access delivers a clear public benefit.

Overall

The lift would result in a low level of less than substantial harm, outweighed by accessibility and usability benefits.

4.5.7 Impact on Accessibility, Use and Functionality

Heritage relevance of use

Adaptation to support viable use is a key component of sustainable conservation.

Effect of the proposals

The scheme delivers:

- improved accessibility and circulation;
- enhanced flexibility;
- improved safeguarding; and
- a more functional arrangement.

Heritage assessment

These represent clear public benefits and carry significant weight in the heritage balance.

4.5.8 Impact on Communal Significance

The proposals would sustain and potentially enhance the building's communal value by supporting its continued and active use for worship and community purposes.

4.5.9 Impact on Setting and Conservation Area

The proposals are unlikely to materially affect the building's contribution to the conservation area. Key aspects of setting, including form, street relationship and visibility, would be preserved.

Assessment

Overall impact on setting is limited.

4.5.10 Overall Heritage Judgement

Summary of impact

The scheme introduces a material level of change, principally affecting:

- internal plan form;
- spatial character; and
- internal volume.

This gives rise to a degree of heritage harm.

Moderating factors

- the interior is already altered;
- external significance is preserved;
- key features are retained;
- substantial functional and communal benefits arise.

Heritage conclusion

The proposals would result in **less than substantial harm**, primarily to the interior. This harm does not undermine the building's overall significance and can be justified in heritage terms.

4.5.11 Scope for Mitigation and Refinement

Further mitigation can be achieved through:

- recessive mezzanine design;
- retention of structural visibility;
- minimising fabric loss;
- conserving key features;
- ensuring new work is legible yet subordinate;
- careful design of external interventions; and
- use of appropriate materials and detailing.

These measures would reduce impact and strengthen the scheme's heritage response.

The proposals will also deliver significant environmental and operational benefits through the introduction of low-carbon heating technology, mechanical ventilation with heat recovery and improved thermal performance. These measures will enhance user comfort, reduce operational energy demand and contribute towards the long-term sustainable use of the listed building.

Degree of Harm

The proposal would alter the perception of the principal worship volume and result in the partial loss of spatial openness within the building. This constitutes harm to significance. However, the works would not affect the principal façade, towers, roof form, external appearance, principal structural system, communal use or overall ecclesiastical identity of the church. The resulting harm is therefore considered to fall within the lower to middle range of less than substantial harm.

5.0 Planning and Heritage Balance

Public Benefits and Justification

The proposals would result in a **material degree of change** to Baldock Methodist Church, most notably through the insertion of a new wall-to-wall first floor structure and associated internal reordering works. Those works would alter the current internal spatial character of the building and would affect the extent to which the church can presently be experienced as a single-volume ecclesiastical interior.

The principal heritage impact of the scheme therefore arises from the effect on the **altered but still significant interior** of the listed building. In particular, the proposals would reduce the present sense of openness and modify aspects of the building's surviving internal spatial character and ecclesiastical legibility.

That harm is real and should not be understated. However, it must also be understood in the context of the building as it survives today. The church does not retain a wholly intact nineteenth-century interior, and its current internal arrangement has already been materially affected by the substantial reordering undertaken in **1982/83**, including the insertion of a first floor structure, subdivision of the front part of the building, and loss of aspects of the original internal plan form and spatial coherence.

The proposals would not remove or fundamentally alter the building's **principal external significance**, including its strongly composed front elevation, overall form, massing, towers, principal openings, and established contribution to Whitehorse Street and the Baldock Conservation Area. Nor would they result in the loss of the building's identity and continued legibility as a historic place of worship.

The removal of the Yew tree will result in an improved appreciation of the church's principal elevation through the loss of intrusive vegetation.

There will consequently be an enhancement of the church forecourt and setting through appropriate arboricultural management, including retention of the Acacia.

The Air Source Heat Pump is proposed within the front forecourt in a location selected to minimise visibility and avoid competition with the principal architectural features of the listed building

For those reasons, the proposals are considered to give rise to **less than substantial harm** to the significance of the listed building.

That harm must be afforded considerable importance and weight. However, it is considered to be **clearly and convincingly justified** by the circumstances of the case. In particular, the scheme will deliver a range of public benefits, including:

- Securing the continued active use of the church as a place of worship and community facility.
- Improved accessibility and inclusivity throughout the building.
- Provision of accommodation capable of supporting contemporary worship, teaching and community activities.
- Improved visibility and appreciation of the principal elevation through landscape enhancements.
- Long-term structural stabilisation of the building.
- Improved interpretation and appreciation of surviving historic fabric through the incorporation of the decorative leaded glass panels within the new circulation core.
- Retention and enhanced visibility of the historic window openings through the removal of existing visually intrusive balustrades and careful set-back of the new first-floor structure.
- Improved energy efficiency and reduced operational carbon emissions.
- Introduction of low-carbon heating technology, including an Air Source Heat Pump.
- Improved thermal comfort and indoor air quality.
- Enhanced long-term viability and resilience of the church.
- Contribution towards the sustainable operation and conservation of a Grade II listed building.

The proposals also arise in the context of a building whose current internal arrangement is already the product of substantial later intervention, and where the principal heritage significance survives most strongly in the external form, key structural character and continued ecclesiastical identity of the asset.

On that basis, it is considered that the identified degree of **less than substantial harm** is outweighed by the **public and functional benefits** of the scheme, including the securing of the building's continued beneficial use.

Sustainability and Environmental Benefits

In addition to the operational and functional benefits arising from the continued use of the church, the proposals deliver a number of important environmental and sustainability

benefits. The introduction of a hybrid heating system incorporating an Air Source Heat Pump, together with mechanical ventilation systems incorporating heat recovery technology, will significantly improve the environmental performance of the building.

The proposals will reduce energy consumption, lower carbon emissions and provide improved thermal comfort and air quality for building users. These improvements will enable the church to operate more efficiently whilst supporting modern expectations for accessibility, comfort and year-round occupation.

Importantly, the works contribute towards the sustainable adaptation of a listed building, ensuring that it remains fit for purpose and capable of supporting active worship and community use into the future. Such measures assist in securing the optimum viable use of the heritage asset and support its long-term conservation.

Overall, the proposals are therefore considered to be acceptable in heritage terms and consistent with the relevant statutory duties and national and local planning policy.

Overall Professional Opinion

This report has identified the significance of Baldock Methodist Church, considered the extent to which that significance survives, and assessed the likely heritage effects of the proposed works.

The proposals would result in a material degree of change to the listed building, principally affecting the already altered interior through the insertion of a new first floor structure and associated internal reordering. That change would give rise to a degree of heritage harm, particularly in relation to the building's surviving internal spatial character and ecclesiastical legibility.

However, the building retains its principal significance most strongly in its external architectural form, townscape presence, and continued identity as a historic place of worship. Those key aspects of significance would remain legible and substantially preserved.

Introduction of a mezzanine:

It is acknowledged that the introduction of a **wall-to-wall first floor structure** is necessary to enable the building to function as a viable and sustainable place of worship, capable of accommodating the existing congregation, supporting future growth, and hosting occasional larger services and community events. It would also facilitate the effective and flexible use of the building, allowing simultaneous activities across different age groups whilst ensuring appropriate acoustic separation.

Church growth as demonstrated in the seating studies and set out in the Statement of Need is a strong factor behind the proposals considered here.

Crucially, it has been demonstrated (in 4.4.1) that alternatives, including set-back floor arrangements and partial or glazed solutions, have been carefully considered but would fail to meet the identified operational needs. As such, they would not represent viable options capable of sustaining the building's ongoing use. The proposal therefore reflects a proportionate and justified intervention, representing the minimum level of change necessary to secure the building's optimum viable use.

Benefits:

The proposals would then secure the continued active use of the building for worship and community purposes, improve accessibility and inclusivity, and support the long-term occupation and viability of the asset in a manner consistent with its historic communal function.

Overall, and subject to careful detailing and implementation, the proposals are considered to represent a justified and proportionate programme of adaptive change. On that basis, the scheme is considered capable of being supported in heritage terms.

Having regard to the significance of the asset, the extent of change proposed, and the public and functional benefits arising from the scheme, it is considered that the proposed reconfiguration is **heritage-planning acceptable in principle**, subject to the quality of detailed design, specification and implementation.

The scheme is not without heritage impact, and careful treatment of the most sensitive aspects of the proposals — particularly the relationship between new insertions and the surviving internal significance of the building — will remain essential.

On balance, the proposals are considered to comprise a sensitive and justifiable programme of adaptive change, capable of sustaining the significance and ongoing life of the heritage asset in a viable and meaningful way.

For those reasons, it is concluded that the proposals can be supported in heritage terms.

Heritage Benefits

The proposals would deliver a number of heritage benefits which contribute positively to the conservation, understanding and long-term viability of the listed building.

Securing a Sustainable Future

The most significant heritage benefit is the securing of the building's long-term viable use as an active place of worship and community facility. Historic England and the NPPF recognise that the optimum conservation of historic buildings is generally achieved through continued beneficial use. The proposals provide a sustainable future for the building, reducing the risk of vacancy, underuse, deterioration and loss of community value.

Conservation Through Use

The proposals will ensure the continued occupation, maintenance and investment in the building. Active use generates the resources and stewardship necessary for ongoing repair and conservation, helping to safeguard the significance of the asset for future generations.

Improved Understanding of the Building

The removal of elements associated with the 1982–83 alterations and the reorganisation of internal spaces will improve appreciation of the building's architectural form and historic development. The proposals allow a clearer understanding of the church's principal spaces and the relationship between historic and later phases of development.

Better Appreciation of Historic Features

The design has been developed to retain and highlight surviving features of significance, including:

- the principal worship space;

- decorative roof trusses;
- stained and leaded glass;
- surviving historic joinery and fittings where retained.

The new first floor is designed to avoid intrusion into the window openings and maintain views of the historic windows from both floor levels, allowing these features to remain legible and appreciated.

Improved Accessibility

The introduction of step-free access throughout the building enables wider public access to a designated heritage asset. This represents a significant public and heritage benefit by allowing a broader range of people to experience and engage with the building.

Environmental Improvements

The installation of modern heating, ventilation and energy-efficient systems will improve the environmental performance of the building and support its long-term sustainability. These measures reduce operational pressures that can otherwise threaten the continued use and maintenance of historic buildings.

Structural Conservation Benefits

The scheme provides an opportunity to address existing structural issues through improved wall restraint measures and associated stabilisation works. These interventions will assist in securing the long-term conservation of the historic fabric and help protect the building from future structural movement.

Enhancement of Communal Significance

The proposals will enable the church to continue serving as a place of worship, education, fellowship and community engagement. This sustains and enhances the building's communal significance, which forms an important component of its overall heritage value.

In summary: The heritage benefits of the proposals extend beyond simply accommodating a new use. The scheme secures the long-term future of a Grade II listed building, improves accessibility, supports environmental sustainability, assists structural conservation, enhances understanding of the building's historic development and sustains its longstanding communal function. These heritage benefits carry substantial weight in the planning balance and should be considered alongside the public benefits arising from the continued use of the building.

5.1 National Planning Policy Framework

NPPF Paragraph 207 – Significance

Paragraph 207 confirms that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. This assessment has therefore sought to identify and understand the significance of Baldock Methodist Church before considering the acceptability of change.

The principal significance of the building derives from its architectural composition, contribution to the Baldock Conservation Area, surviving worship space and roof structure, selected historic fabric, and longstanding communal and religious function. The proposals have been developed with regard to these elements of significance and seek to retain those aspects that contribute most strongly to the building's special interest.

NPPF Paragraph 208 – Proportionate Assessment

Paragraph 208 requires a proportionate assessment of significance sufficient to understand the impact of the proposals. This Heritage Statement examines the building's history, architectural character, surviving fabric, previous alterations and capacity for change, with particular regard to the substantial internal reordering undertaken in 1982–83.

The level of assessment is considered proportionate to both the Grade II status of the building and the nature of the proposed works.

NPPF Paragraph 212 – Less Than Substantial Harm

The proposals would result in a degree of less than substantial harm through alterations to the internal plan form, spatial character and perception of volume within the worship space.

However, the principal façade, roof form, towers, external appearance and contribution to the conservation area would be preserved. The harm is therefore considered to lie at the lower end of the less than substantial harm spectrum.

This harm is outweighed by public benefits including:

- securing the long-term viable use of the building;
- improved accessibility and inclusivity;
- enhanced facilities for worship and community activities;
- improved environmental performance; and
- safeguarding the building's continued occupation and maintenance.

NPPF Paragraph 215 – Enhancement and Better Understanding

Paragraph 215 encourages opportunities to better reveal significance. The proposals provide such opportunities through the retention and improved appreciation of surviving historic features, enhanced accessibility, improved legibility of the building and the continued active use of the church as a place of worship and community facility.

The proposals have been informed by a clear understanding of significance in accordance with NPPF Paragraphs 207 and 208. Whilst a degree of less than substantial harm has been identified, it is outweighed by the substantial public benefits arising from the scheme, consistent with Paragraph 212. The proposals also support the long-term conservation and appreciation of the building in accordance with Paragraph 215 and are therefore considered to accord with the objectives of Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This Heritage Impact Assessment has considered the significance of Baldock Methodist Church and the likely effect of the proposed reconfiguration works on its special interest as a **Grade II listed building** and as a positive contributor to the **Baldock Conservation Area**.

The assessment has identified that the significance of the building derives principally from:

- its status as a **purpose-built nineteenth-century ecclesiastical building**;

- its **architectural and townscape presence** within Whitehorse Street and the wider conservation area;
- its **historic and communal value** as a long-established place of worship;
- the survival of key aspects of its **external architectural composition**;
- the contribution made by surviving internal volume, structural form and historic fabric, albeit within a building that has experienced phases of alteration over time.

The assessment has also found that the significance of the asset is **not evenly distributed**, and that the present interior appears to have been materially affected by earlier phases of adaptation and remodelling. As such, the building must be assessed not as an untouched or wholly intact historic interior, but as an **evolving heritage asset** whose significance now lies in a combination of surviving original character, altered historic fabric, communal use and townscape presence.

Against that background, the proposed works would introduce a **meaningful degree of change**, particularly to the internal arrangement of the building. The proposals would alter the current plan form, insert additional accommodation, modify circulation, and involve selective intervention into the existing fabric and spatial character of the interior.

The principal areas of heritage sensitivity arise from:

- the reconfiguration of the internal plan form;
- the insertion of new upper-level / mezzanine accommodation;
- associated structural intervention;
- the effect on internal volume and spatial legibility; and
- the potential impact on surviving historic fabric and principal internal features.

These aspects of the scheme are capable of giving rise to a degree of **heritage harm**, particularly in relation to the altered but still significant interior of the building.

However, the assessment has also concluded that:

- the **principal external identity and townscape contribution** of the building would largely be retained;
- the scheme does not appear to involve the loss of the building's essential ecclesiastical character;
- elements of higher significance can, in principle, continue to be preserved and appreciated;
- the altered nature of the present interior moderates the level of heritage sensitivity in some affected areas; and
- the proposals have the potential, subject to detailed execution, to better reveal or enhance appreciation of certain surviving features of significance.

Accordingly, the proposals are considered likely to result in a degree of **less than substantial harm** to the significance of the listed building. That harm is not negligible, but nor is it considered to be of such magnitude as to fundamentally undermine the building's principal significance or heritage identity.

The proposals will secure the long-term future of the church through a combination of improved accessibility, enhanced functionality, structural stabilisation and environmental upgrades. The introduction of low-carbon heating and ventilation systems will improve sustainability and operational efficiency whilst supporting the continued viable use of the building.

These benefits carry substantial weight in the planning balance and outweigh the identified less than substantial harm arising from the proposed works.

APPENDIX A: 1982 PLAN DRAWINGS



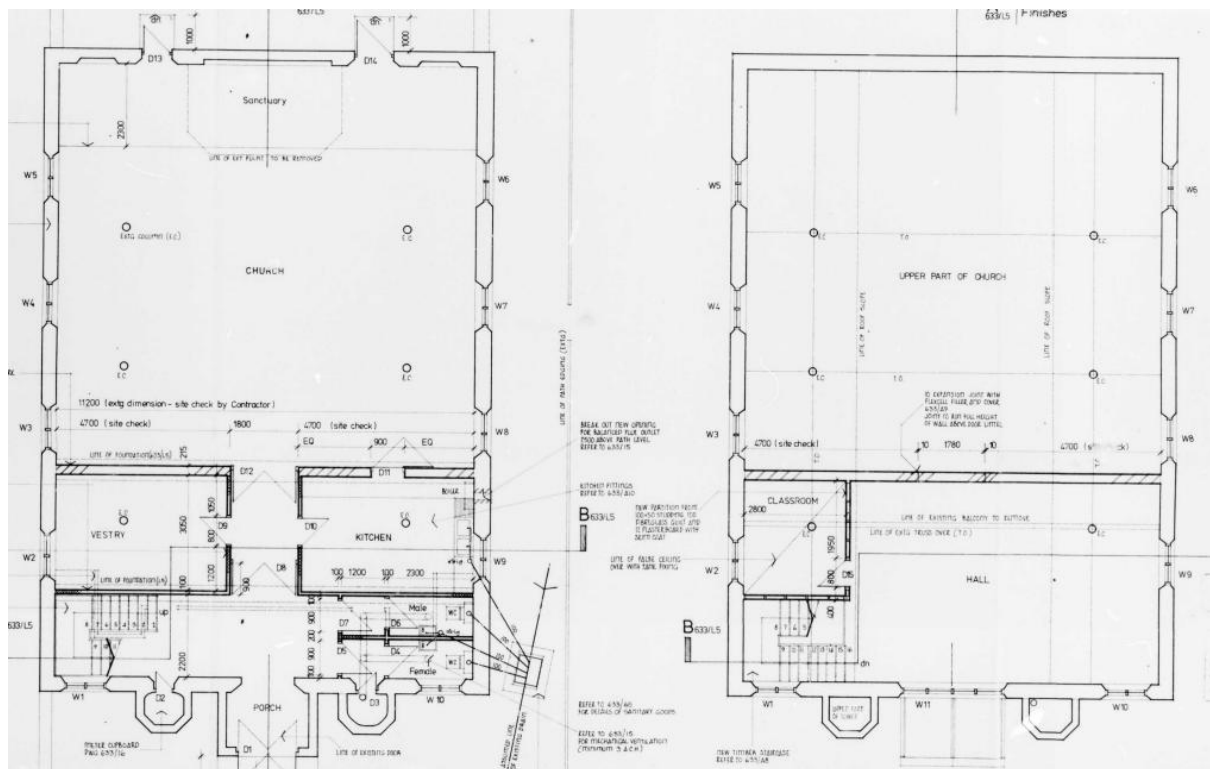
Plans show the demolition of **rear hall and classroom**

Internal demolition of:

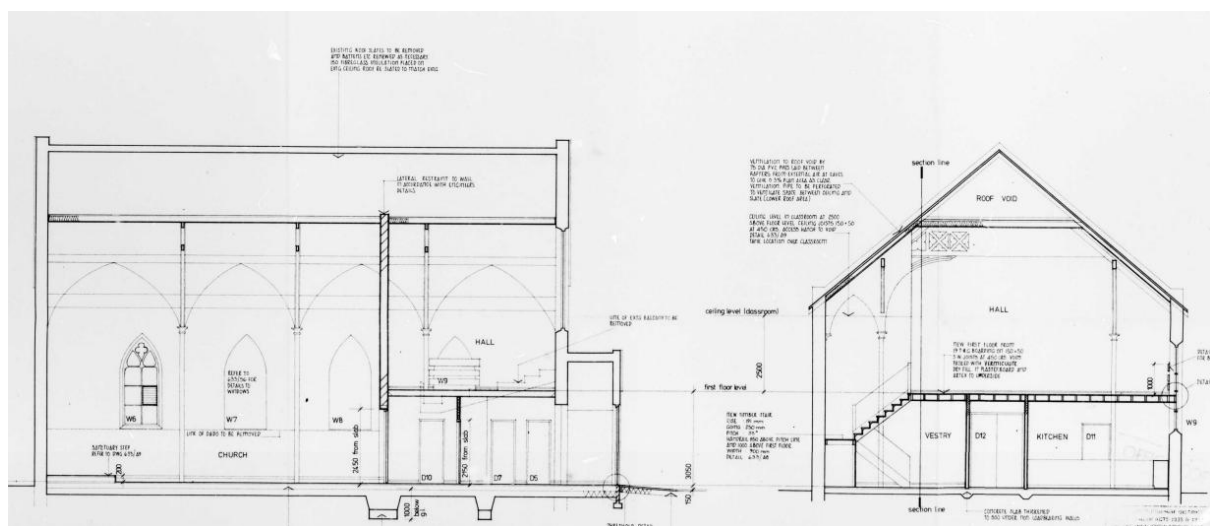
- Balcony
- Partitions
- Sanctuary elements

Subdivision of the church to create:

- Smaller worship space
- Ancillary rooms across ground and first floor



Proposed plans



Proposed sections

APPENDIX B: HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

Historic Character of Whitehorse Street and the Surrounding Area

Whitehorse Street forms part of Baldock's historic town centre and should be understood as an element of the town's long-established medieval and post-medieval street framework rather than as a later suburban route. Its significance lies not in the presence of monumental architecture, but in the way it preserves aspects of Baldock's historic urban grain, including narrow plot divisions, continuous frontage development, rear access arrangements, and a built form characteristic of a small market town and trading centre.

Baldock is recognised as one of Hertfordshire's earliest planned towns, and the historic street pattern of the centre remains legible today. Whitehorse Street appears to derive from this early morphology, with its linear arrangement, relatively narrow frontages, and close relationship between buildings and the street. These characteristics suggest that the street formed part of the town's historic commercial and domestic core and developed incrementally over time, rather than as part of any single comprehensive phase of expansion.

As elsewhere within Baldock, development along Whitehorse Street reflects successive periods of rebuilding, adaptation and refacing. Although many surviving buildings now present Georgian, Victorian or later frontages, these often sit within earlier plot structures and, in some cases, may incorporate or overlie older fabric. This layered pattern of change is typical of historic market towns, where buildings were repeatedly adapted to suit changing domestic, commercial and institutional needs while the underlying town plan remained largely intact.

Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Whitehorse Street appears to have evolved as part of Baldock's established small-town commercial network. This period likely saw the replacement or refacing of earlier timber-fronted buildings in brick, the adaptation of domestic properties to mixed commercial use, and the retention or formation of carriage access to rear yards and service areas. The significance of the street therefore derives not only from individual buildings, but from the survival of a coherent and historically legible pattern of development.

Unlike places subject to widespread redevelopment, Baldock town centre has retained a notable degree of continuity in scale, grain and alignment. Whitehorse Street in particular appears to have been shaped by gradual alteration rather than wholesale reconstruction. Its character is therefore closely tied to the survival of modest building scale, closely spaced frontages, varied rooflines, and the intimate relationship between built form and the public realm.

In the modern period, the historic character of Whitehorse Street has increasingly been recognised and managed through conservation policy. Its contribution to the Baldock Conservation Area derives from the survival of its historic street form, its architectural variety within a consistent scale, and its role in preserving the visual and spatial qualities of the town centre. As such, its present character reflects both historic development and more recent efforts to preserve and manage that inherited townscape.

Architectural Character of Baldock Methodist Church

Townscape and External Character

Baldock Methodist Church occupies a visually prominent position on Whitehorse Street and forms part of the established historic frontage of the street. The building is listed at Grade II and contributes positively both as an individual heritage asset and as part of a wider group of historic buildings within the conservation area.

The church is a purpose-built nineteenth-century ecclesiastical structure of distinctive but relatively restrained character. It is constructed in red brick with stucco dressings and presents a formal principal elevation to Whitehorse Street. The front elevation is composed symmetrically beneath a gabled roof and is distinguished by twin octagonal turrets capped by small cupolas, giving the building a recognisable and somewhat theatrical street presence. The large central window and ecclesiastical detailing reinforce its identity as a religious building, while its scale remains appropriate to the relatively modest town-centre context in which it sits.

Architecturally, the building reflects a Victorian chapel tradition that combines elements of Gothic and Tudor revival styling in a simplified and locally adapted form. Its significance derives less from elaborate ornament than from the strength of its silhouette, the clarity of its front composition, and the way in which it contributes to the rhythm and enclosure of Whitehorse Street. In this respect, the church has a dual architectural role: it is both a distinct public building and an integrated part of the historic townscape.

The church is set slightly back from the street behind a modest enclosed forecourt. This space forms part of the immediate setting of the building and allows the principal elevation to be appreciated more fully from the public realm than many neighbouring properties which sit directly on the back edge of the pavement. The forecourt therefore contributes to the way in which the building is experienced within the street and enhances its visual presence within the conservation area.

Architectural Form and Interior Character

Internally, the church retains the recognisable form of a small historic place of worship, although its plan and spatial quality have been affected by later adaptation. In its original conception, the building would have comprised a principal worship space arranged on a clear liturgical axis, supported by ancillary circulation and service functions. That basic ecclesiastical identity remains legible despite later interventions.

The architectural character of the interior is defined by its volume, simplicity, and structural expression. The main worship space is relatively modest in scale but possesses a clear devotional character. Historically, this would have been reinforced by the relationship between nave and sanctuary, the organisation of seating, and the presence of liturgical fittings and musical accompaniment. Surviving features of interest are understood to include traditional joinery, stained or leaded glass, and elements of the roof structure, all of which contribute to the residual ecclesiastical quality of the interior.

The most substantial changes to the building occurred during the remodelling of 1982–83, following the disposal of the former rear hall. These works introduced a first floor structure

within the front part of the building, together with subdivision to provide ancillary accommodation including meeting rooms, kitchen facilities, WCs, a vestry and entrance spaces. While these changes were undertaken to support continued use, they materially altered the spatial logic of the original building and diminished aspects of its architectural clarity.

In particular, the insertion of a floor and partitions within the front section of the church interrupted the original volume of the entrance end of the building and severed the visual and spatial relationship between the principal front elevation and the worship space behind. The large front window, originally an important architectural and liturgical feature, was effectively isolated from the sanctuary and redirected to serve the inserted upper room. This has had a notable effect on the quality of the interior, reducing natural light and diminishing the coherence of the principal worship space.

As a result, the present interior reflects a layered history of adaptation rather than a wholly intact nineteenth-century ecclesiastical interior. This is characteristic of many long-lived places of worship, where changing congregational needs have necessitated periodic reordering. The building therefore has an architectural character that is both historic and evolutionary, combining surviving nineteenth-century form with later interventions of varying sensitivity.

Character-Defining Features

The historic and architectural character of the building and its setting is principally derived from the following elements:

Exterior

- The symmetrical principal façade to Whitehorse Street;
- The gabled front composition and steeply pitched roof form;
- The twin octagonal turrets with cupolas;
- The use of red brick with stucco dressings;
- The large central front window and ecclesiastical detailing;
- The building's modest but distinctive scale within the streetscape;
- The slight set-back from the street and enclosed forecourt;
- The contribution of the building to the group value and visual enclosure of Whitehorse Street.

Interior

- The surviving legibility of the principal worship space;
- The relationship between nave-like volume and sanctuary focus;
- Elements of historic joinery and decorative glazing;
- Surviving evidence of ecclesiastical planning and use;
- The continued readability of the building as a place of worship despite later change.

Historic Use and Evolution

The church contributes to the historic character of Whitehorse Street not only through its architecture, but also through the way in which it illustrates the diversification of Baldock town centre during the nineteenth century. The insertion of a purpose-built Methodist chapel into an already historic street reflects a wider period in which Nonconformist worship became a visible and established component of life in English market towns.

The building also has a broader evidential value as part of the continued evolution of Whitehorse Street. It represents a phase in which the town centre expanded beyond its earlier commercial and domestic functions to accommodate religious, communal and civic activity. In this sense, the church forms part of the layered historic character of the street and contributes to understanding the changing social geography of Baldock.

Twentieth-century changes, including the former rear hall, later internal alterations, and subsequent adaptation for changing patterns of use, form part of that continuing history. While not all of these changes are of equal architectural quality, they illustrate the long-term occupation and practical adaptation of the building in response to congregational and community needs.

Summary

The historic and architectural character of Baldock Methodist Church is derived from the relationship between its nineteenth-century ecclesiastical design, its position within the medieval street framework of Whitehorse Street, and its contribution to the wider townscape of Baldock Conservation Area.

Its significance in character terms lies less in elaborate architectural display than in the coherence of its form, materials, silhouette and street presence, together with the continued legibility of its religious function and its place within the historic grain of the town. The building should therefore be understood as part of the cumulative historic environment of Whitehorse Street: a modest but architecturally distinctive component of Baldock's rich urban character.