

Planning & Heritage Statement

**CONVERSION OF AND ALTERATIONS TO VACANT CHURCH TO
RESIDENTIAL USE TO PROVIDE 11 APARTMENTS**

**FORMER CHURCH PREMISES, WAKEFIELD ROAD, SMITHIES,
BARNSELY S711NP**

**PREPARED BY: TOM SHIELS
CHECKED BY: JAMES ROBERTS MRTPI**

1. INTRODUCTION

This statement has been prepared to support the submission of an application for full planning permission for the redevelopment of a vacant church and church hall to deliver 11 residential apartments.

The proposal would also result in 11 new homes within a sustainable location through reuse of a building. By repurposing an existing structure, the proposal minimises demolition waste, reduces the need for new construction materials, and respects the established built form and character of the area. This approach not only contributes to meeting local housing needs but does so in a manner that is environmentally responsible, visually coherent, and consistent with national and local planning policy objectives encouraging brownfield regeneration.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the submitted plans and technical justification which demonstrate the credentials of the scheme in more detail. It is anticipated the Local Planning Authority (LPA) will adopt a progressive approach to this sustainable scheme.

It is anticipated that the LPA may consider the former church building to be a non-designated heritage asset. As such, this statement incorporates a Heritage Assessment as required by the NPPF.

This statement now proceeds to give details of the site. The details of the proposal are then set out. The planning merits of the scheme are then discussed in relation to relevant planning policies contained in the statutory development plan, together with Government guidance principally set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Finally, the conclusion is reached that planning permission should be granted for the proposed development.

2. THE SITE AND PLANNING HISTORY

The application site comprises a church and church hall thought to have been constructed as a Wesleyan Reform Church. The side of the property fronts Wakefield Road and has vehicular access off Carleton Road via Isobel Close. The site measures approximately 0.25h in area. The site is located within a built up sustainable residential area making it a suitable location for redevelopment. The site is not within a Conservation Area and there are no listed buildings nearby.

In recent years, the buildings have been vacant and were listed for auction in December 2024 where it was purchased by the applicant. Both buildings are attractive stone-built structures with the site having frontage on to Wakefield Road. The site and its context can be seen in the following ariel image:



There is no planning history for the site according to the Council's online records.

3. THE PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission for the redevelopment of the existing buildings to provide 11 residential units. Full design details of the proposed dwellings can be found in the supporting plans. However, at this stage the main details of the proposal are as follows:

- The conversion scheme provides 11 1 bed apartments.
- 11 parking spaces are proposed.
- The scheme retains the existing areas of green space.
- The proposal provides a sensitive conversion of two existing buildings with minimal alterations within a sustainable location.
- The development would conserve, and secure the long-term future of, the significance of the non-designated heritage asset.

4. ALLOCATION AND POLICIES

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the Development Plan consists of the Barnsley Local Plan (adopted January 2019).

Material considerations exist in the form of national policy and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as updated in December 2024 and the suite of documents comprising National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). The Council's Supplementary Planning Document Design of Housing Development Adopted July 2023 is also considered relevant.

Allocations

The site is located within the Settlement boundary with no specific allocation.

National

The NPPF is reflective of the guidance contained within the NPPG. The following sections of the revised NPPF are considered of direct relevance to the current proposal:

- Section 2 - Achieving sustainable development
- Section 4 - Decision-making
- Section 6 - Building a strong, competitive economy
- Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places
- Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The overarching message of the NPPF is that LPAs should adopt a positive and pro-active approach to planning proposals, particularly those that result in sustainable development. LPAs should not place unnecessary burdens on developers and should look to support appropriate schemes such as this.

Also, it is important to note in this case that as per the recent Statement of Common Ground in the appeal between Hargreaves Land Limited and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (PINS Ref: APP/R4408/W/25/3359917), that the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land. As such, in accordance with Paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the "tilted balance" is engaged. This means that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole.

Barnsley Local Plan

The following policies are considered of relevance:

Policy GD1 General Development

Policy LG2 The Location of Growth

Policy E7 Loss of Local Services and Community Facilities in Villages

Policy H1 The Number of New Homes to be Built

Policy H2 The Distribution of New Homes

Policy H4 Residential Development on Small Non-allocated Sites

Policy H6 Housing Mix and Efficient Use of Land

Policy T3 New Development and Sustainable Travel

Policy T4 New development and Transport Safety

Policy D1 High Quality Design and Place Making

Conversion of Former Church to 11 Apartments Wakefield Road



Policy BIO1 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Policy CC1 Climate Change

Policy CC2 Sustainable Design and Construction

Policy HE1 The Historic Environment

Policy HE2 Heritage Statements and general application procedures

Policy HE3 Development affecting Historic Buildings

5. ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

The proposed development seeks to convert and sensitively redevelop a former church on Wakefield Road, Smithies, Barnsley, into 11 residential units. In assessing the principle of development, it is important to consider both the local policy context and the national planning framework, particularly in light of the Council's acknowledged shortfall in deliverable housing land.

It is now formally agreed, as per the recent Statement of Common Ground in the appeal between Hargreaves Land Limited and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (PINS Ref: APP/R4408/W/25/3359917), that the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land. As such, in accordance with Paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the "tilted balance" is engaged. This means that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole.

The site comprises a vacant and unused former church building, which has not served any active community function for a number of years. It is understood that no formal services or community activities have been held at the premises for a considerable period, and there is no realistic prospect of the building returning to active community use in the future.

Consequently, the loss of this facility must be assessed in the context of Local Plan Policy E7 (Loss of Local Services and Community Facilities in Villages).

Policy E7 sets a presumption in favour of retaining valued local services, but allows for change of use where it can be demonstrated that the facility is no longer economically viable or that the change will not materially reduce the ability of local people to access similar

services. In this case, the building has remained unoccupied for an extended period and is no longer viable as a place of worship or community facility. Furthermore, the surrounding area is well-served by a range of alternative community venues and places of worship within accessible distances, particularly towards Barnsley town centre and the wider Smithies area. These include the Gateway Church, Hope House Church and Manor Court Community Centre.

The proposed development represents an opportunity to bring a redundant, underutilised building back into active use, in a manner that is sympathetic to its architectural character while contributing positively to housing supply in a highly sustainable urban location. The reuse of an existing structure further aligns with national and local sustainability objectives, by reducing construction waste and the carbon footprint associated with demolition and new build schemes.

Given the acknowledged housing shortfall, the pressing need for new homes, the building's longstanding vacancy, and the lack of reasonable prospect of re-use for community purposes, the loss of a former community facility is clearly outweighed by the significant benefits of the scheme. These include the delivery of high-quality housing, regeneration of a prominent site, and support for the Council's wider spatial strategy.

Accordingly, the principle of development is considered acceptable, and planning permission should be granted in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF.

Design and Heritage Assessment

This section of the report forms a Heritage Statement. The Heritage Statement provides an assessment of the significance of the heritage assets that could be affected by the development, and of the impacts that development could have upon them.

The site is not within a Conservation Area and there are no listed buildings in the locality. However, the two buildings are of some architectural and historic significance, and could be considered to form a non-designated heritage asset.

This statement meets the requirements set out in paragraph 207 of the NPPF, which states:

“In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.”

In doing so, this statement also meets the requirements of local plan policy HE2.

In compiling the Heritage Statement, the Historic Environment Record (HER) has been consulted via the Heritage Gateway platform. This search has not returned any results.

This statement includes an assessment of the significance of the heritage asset and an assessment of the impact of the development on it. The assessment of significance follows the guidance and principles contained in Historic England Advice Note 12 - Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets.

The main church building first appears on the 1932 edition OS map.



The hall, therefore, appears to have been a later edition. The church is understood to have been constructed around 1912 as a Smithies Wesleyan Reform Church. The hall is understood to have been built as a Sunday school towards the middle of the 20th century. It then remained in use as a methodist church until its closure several years ago.

The significance of the building derives from its historic communal value as a place of worship for the local community and its architectural interest as a good example of an early 20th century methodist reform church as associated Sunday school. The extent of the significance is limited to the local level, given the buildings are not listed.

In terms of the impact on the significance of the non-designated heritage asset,

The development has been guided by policies D1, HE1 and HE3 of the Barnsley Local Plan, which requires new development to be of high quality, reflect local character, and contribute to a strong sense of place and to conserve the historic environment and historic buildings.

The existing church building, while no longer in active use, is a prominent and attractive building in the street scene. The smaller building is more discreet. The proposal retains key features, including the original roof profiles, stone elevations, and window patterns, ensuring the visual integrity of the buildings is maintained.

New interventions, such as dormer windows, have been kept to a minimum and are designed to match the scale and appearance of the original architecture. Internally, the buildings will be subdivided to provide well-proportioned living accommodation that meets modern standards while respecting the limitations and layout of the original structures. In doing so, the architectural interest of the building is conserved.

The surrounding site will be enhanced through new landscaping, discreet bin storage, and 11 car parking spaces, all arranged to avoid any adverse impact on the appearance of the site. These external works have been designed to sit comfortably within the site and avoid detracting from the character of the existing buildings or the wider street scene.

The proposed reuse will also secure the long-term future of the heritage asset by bringing it back into beneficial use.

The scheme aligns with Policy CC1 (Climate Change and Sustainable Design) by reusing an existing building, helping to reduce carbon emissions and construction waste. Making use of a redundant building in this way supports a more sustainable form of development, in line with both local and national planning objectives.

Overall, the design has been approached in a careful and considered way, with a focus on retaining the key qualities of the site while delivering much-needed new homes in a sustainable and appropriate manner. The development will preserve the significance of the

non-designated heritage asset. The result is a scheme that fits well within its setting and meets the aims of the Local Plan and the NPPF.

Highways

The site is accessed via Isobel Close, which provides an existing and established point of entry to the former church and school building. The access and associated parking area previously supported the building's use for religious and community purposes, which would have generated regular vehicle movements, particularly during events and services. The proposed residential use is expected to generate a comparable or lower level of traffic, and as such, no intensification of use would occur.

The existing car parking area will be retained to serve the development, providing 11 space which is considered a proportionate level of off-street parking for residents of the development with each apartment provided with a parking space. Provision is also made for refuse collection, utilising the access arrangements designed to ensure ease of movement and safe operation. Adequate parking is to be provided within the site along with sufficient space to allow vehicles to enter, turn and exit the site in a forward gear. The site is in a highly accessible area, with regular public transport services available nearby on Wakefield Road negating the need to solely rely on the private car. The development is considered acceptable in highway terms and complies with Barnsley Local Plan Policy T4 – New Development and Transport Safety.

Residential Amenity

The development has been designed to provide a high standard of amenity for future residents while safeguarding the living conditions of neighbouring properties. Each unit meets the nationally described space standards, ensuring that internal layouts offer practical, well-proportioned living spaces. The scheme also provides good levels of daylight and outlook, contributing to a comfortable residential environment.

The building's existing scale and massing are retained, and new windows have been sensitively located to avoid overlooking or a loss of privacy for neighbouring homes. Shared amenity space is included through landscaped areas around the building, and the design respects the amenity of existing residents. As such, the proposal is considered to achieve a well-balanced and appropriate form of development that integrates successfully into the existing residential context.

Ecology

The site comprises previously developed land and consists of existing buildings and associated hardstanding, with limited areas of soft landscaping. There is no evidence to suggest that the site supports protected habitats or notable species. Any vegetation present is limited and mostly to the front of the building which is unaffected by the proposal. All existing grassed areas will remain as amenity space.

While the site's baseline ecological value is considered low, the proposed development includes opportunities to deliver a net gain in biodiversity in line with national and local policy requirements. Measures such as the incorporation of bird and bat boxes, enhancement of soft landscaping, and the use of native planting could be introduced as part of the scheme. These enhancements will support urban wildlife and contribute positively to the ecological quality of the site. The development is therefore considered to be acceptable in ecological terms and consistent with the aims of Barnsley Local Plan Policy BIO1 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity and the National Planning Policy Framework.

6. CONCLUSION

This proposal presents a well-considered and sustainable redevelopment of a long-vacant building at the former Church Premises on Wakefield Road, Smithies. It would deliver 11 high-quality homes through the sensitive conversion of the former church and school house, making effective use of previously developed land in a well-connected and accessible location and conserving the significance of a non-designated heritage asset. The scheme responds positively to its surroundings and aligns with the principles of sustainable development.

The Council has confirmed, through a recent Statement of Common Ground, that it cannot currently demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land. In line with Paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework, this engages the tilted balance in favour of granting planning permission unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. In this case, there are clear and compelling benefits with no overriding harm.

The design of the development respects the character of the existing building and surrounding area, retaining the original architectural features and ensuring that all new additions are discreet and appropriate. The scheme complies with Policy D1 of the Barnsley Local Plan and the adopted SPD on design. The proposal also meets the relevant standards for space, layout, and amenity, delivering well-proportioned homes while protecting the living conditions of existing residents, in line with Policy GD1.

In terms of access and transport, the development utilises an existing point of entry via Isobel Close and retains an established parking area. The level of traffic expected from 11 homes is modest and will not place any undue pressure on the surrounding network. The site is also well served by public transport and local services, reducing the need for reliance on the private car. The proposal meets the requirements of Policy T4.

Although the scheme involves the loss of a former community building, there is no ongoing or viable community use, and the wider area is already served by a number of alternative venues and places of worship. These are accessible to residents and provide suitable alternatives, meeting the criteria of Policy E7.

The proposal offers a sustainable, well-designed, and policy-compliant reuse of a redundant site. It contributes meaningfully to housing supply at a time of identified shortfall and will bring a vacant building back into use in a way that respects its context and benefits the wider area. On that basis, planning permission should be granted.