HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

25/00769/FUL

OFFICER REPORT

Case No: **25/00769/FUL** **Full Planning Application**

Proposal: **Replacement of front entrance doors and re-grading of external surfacing to provide non-stepped access**

Location: **Buckden Methodist Church Church Street Buckden**

Applicant: **Managing Trustees of Buckden Methodist Church**

Grid Ref: **519445 267690**

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The site is the Buckden Methodist Church located on Church Street in Buckden. The site is situated in flood zone 1 and falls within the Buckden Conservation Area and there are a number of Grade II Listed Buildings in the immediate vicinity. The closest being Alms Houses sited directly to the west and 41 Church Street sited on the opposite side of the road to the south.

Planning Permission is sought for the replacement of front entrance doors and re-grading of external surfacing to provide non-stepped access.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11). .'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):

* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* achieving well-designed places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural environment;
* conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2019 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)

LP8: Key Service Centres
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation

LP14: Amenity
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP22: Local Services and Community Facilities
LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings

Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017):
* Place Making Principles - Part 3.7 Building Form

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

9000930FUL - Extension to schoolroom of chapel – Permission
9000931CAC - Alterations and extension including part demolition.
Schoolroom of Methodist Chapel, Church Street, Buckden. – Consent

9200122CAC - Removal of redundant chimney stack.
The Methodist Church, Church Street, Buckden. - Consent

CONSULTATIONS

Buckden Parish Council recommend approval.

HDC's Conservation Team: Support the proposal, with a recommendation to amend the door design to better preserve the church's contribution to the Conservation Area.

REPRESENTATIONS

None received at the time of determination.

The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:
- Principle of Development
- Design and Visual Amenity
- Impact on Heritage Assets
- Residential amenity

Principle of Development

The proposed development is located in Buckden, which is identified as being a Key Service Centre in accordance with LP8 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036.

LP22 covers local services and community facilities which includes places of worship and states that a proposal for a new local service or community facility within a built-up area, or the extension of an existing local service or community facility on lane immediately adjoining the build up area, will be supported where it retains or enhances and existing service or facility.

The proposal to replace the existing front entrance doors and re-grade the external surfacing to provide a non-stepped access would not change the existing use of the Church and therefore would not conflict with Policy LP8 or LP22.

As such, the principle of the proposed development is supported in this instance and accords with Policies LP8 and LP22 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036.

Design and Visual Amenity

Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Local Plan and the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017) set out key principles of good design to support proposals that respond positively to their context, integrate successfully with the surrounding built form and create well designed and sustainable developments that are functional to meet the needs of present and future occupiers.

The application seeks to improve accessibility to Buckden Methodist Church through the installation of new entrance doors and the re-grading of the external approach to provide level access. The church is a non-designated heritage asset located within the Buckden Conservation Area. The replacement door would be European oak door leaves with hardwax oil finish and clear double glazed units. New paving would be laid to fall no steeper than 1:20 using 450x450x50mm slabs with red engineering brick flush edging to create a level/non-stepped access into the chapel. This would meet the requirements of a level approach under Approved Document M Volume 2 of the current Building Regulations and would therefore not require the provision of handrails. Sprayed margins of gravel would also be added to the new path to accommodate the minor change in level between the existing external surfacing and the new path. The scale, bulk and design of the proposal would be acceptable and would not be considered to be harmful to the character and appearance of the Methodist Church or the surrounding area.

Overall, the proposed development would not have an adverse impact upon the character of the area. The proposal therefore accords with Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

Residential Amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

In regard to neighbouring amenity, due to the nature of the development, it is not considered that the proposal would cause detrimental harm to neighbour amenity with regards to overlooking, loss of light, overbearing impact or loss of privacy.

It is therefore considered that the proposal would not have a significant detrimental impact upon the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

The proposal therefore accords with Policy LP14 of Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and Section 12 of the NPPF (2019) in this regard.

Impact on Heritage Assets

Section 72 of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990 (as amended) states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

The Planning (Listed buildings and conservation areas) Act 1990 s66 and s72 requires that the determining authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area and special regard to the preservation of the special architectural and historic interest of a listed building.

Buckden Methodist Church is a non-designated Heritage Asset located within the Buckden Conservation Area. There are a number of Grade II Listed Buildings adjacent to the site. The application seeks to improve accessibility to Buckden Methodist Church through the installation of new entrance doors and the re-grading of the external approach to provide level access.

The Council's Conservation Officer has been consulted and supports the proposal in principle, recognising the public benefits of improved accessibility. However, a recommendation was made

to amend the design of the replacement doors to incorporate a larger single-leaf door centrally positioned, flanked by fixed timber panels. This design was considered to better reflect the traditional character of the building and enhance its contribution to the conservation area.

The applicant has provided a detailed justification for the proposed design, explaining that several options were explored, including the Conservation Officer's preferred arrangement. However, the existing clear opening width of 1220mm between the timber jambs must be retained to allow for the passage of coffins during funeral services. A single door of this width would be overly heavy and impractical for daily use, while the introduction of fixed side panels would reduce the usable width and compromise this important functional requirement.

While the Conservation Officer's recommendation is noted and understood, it is considered that the proposed design represents an appropriate and justified response to the building's functional requirements. The public benefits of improved accessibility and continued use of the church for key community functions, including funerals, are considered to outweigh the minor harm to the conservation area resulting from the door design.

It is therefore considered that the proposals accord with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, NPPF and Local Plan Policy LP34.

Conclusion

Whilst comments from HDC's Conservation Team have been noted, officer view is that, on balance, the public benefit would outweigh the potential harm in this instance and is therefore considered acceptable and it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

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