

St John's Downshire Hill

Design, Access, and Conservation statement

Site Address: Downshire Hill, London NW3 1NU

August 2023

Ref: 2026-MEB-XX-XX-RP-A-3-900

DRAFT



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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This statement supports a planning and listed building consent application to install a lead upstand flashing around the base of the pedestal to the cupola at St John's Church, Downshire Hill, in lieu of an existing rendered upstand. The render above the proposed flashing is also proposed to be replaced, and its key (a metal lath on original timber frame) replaced with a stainless steel lath.

The objective of the proposal is to minimise impact on the significance of the heritage asset and improve the weathering detail at the base of the render, which has failed in the past and is failing again.

This Statement demonstrates the following:

1. The building's heritage is outstanding and needs to be protected.
2. There is a justified need for the alteration.
3. The fabric will be improved as a result and become more resilient.

Some discussion around this proposal was had with the Conservation Officer (Nick Baxter) during June 2023.

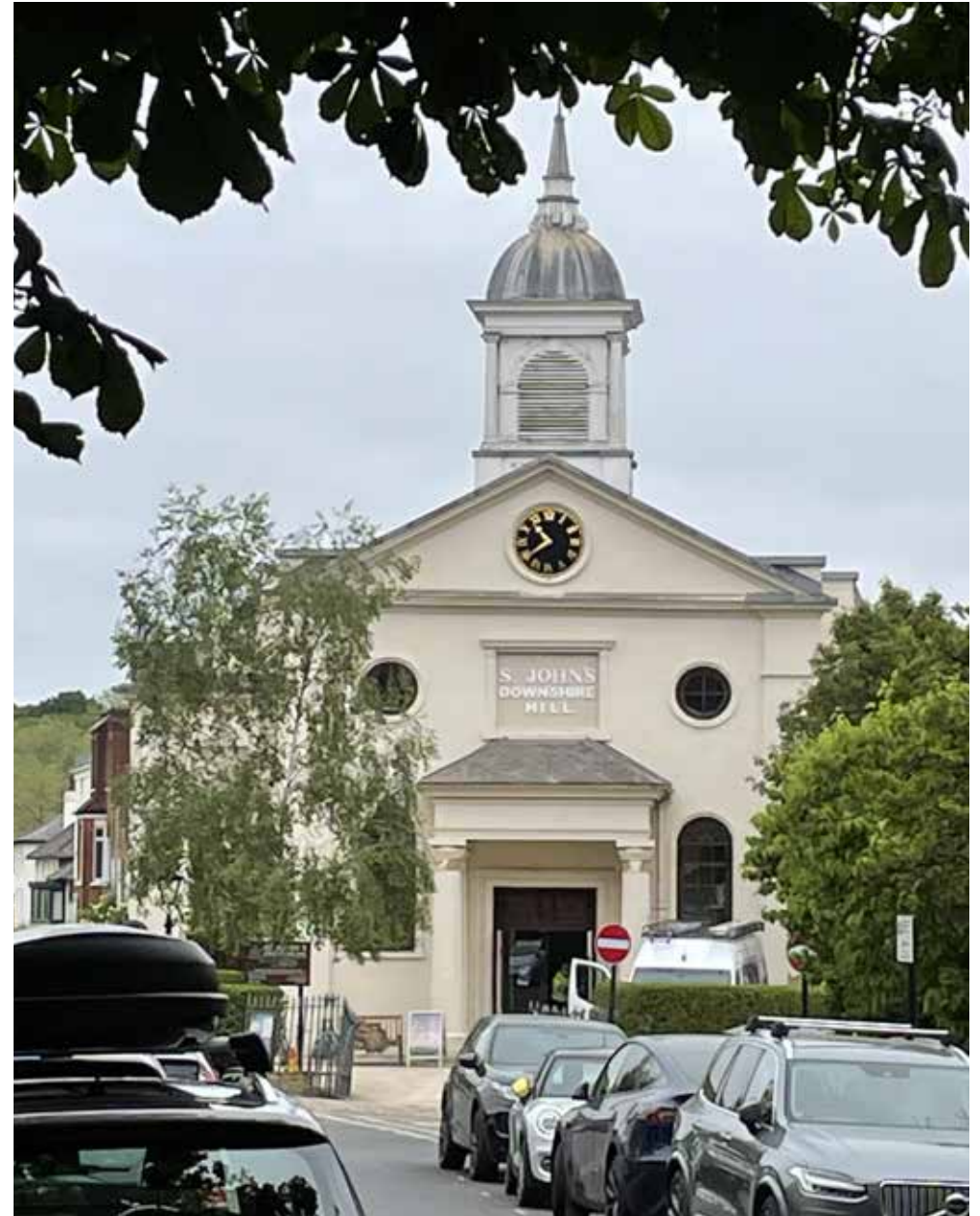


Image 1: St Johns Downshire Hill - front elevation and cupola

1.2 Location and Site Description

The Church belongs to the conservative Evangelical Anglican tradition of churches.

It is only one of three remaining Proprietary Chapels of the Church of England in London, located in Downshire Hill, Hampstead on the junction with Keats Grove - in the London Borough of Camden, and within the Conservation Area of Hampstead, which offers considerable environmental quality and variety.

A range of factors and attributes come together to create the special character of the Hampstead conservation area. These are principally: its topography; the Heath; the range, excellence and mix of buildings; the street pattern and Hampstead's historical association with clean water and fresh air.

St John's Downshire Hill is one of only seven Grade I listed buildings in the Hampstead Conservation Area. And it forms the centre-piece of the Downshire Hill character area which is noteworthy within the conservation area for its high number of early 19th century listed buildings, the use of stucco and the diversity of styles.



Image 2: location plan



Image 3: map of Hampstead conservation area

2. UNDERSTANDING THE HERITAGE

The Proprietary Chapel of St John's was built in 1823 and is Grade I listed (refer to list entry in appendix). The building arose as a result of housing development in the area of Hampstead at the time, and has gained high heritage significance. The handsome simple classical exterior of the building is matched internally with a high quality classically detailed interior which remains largely original.

The church building has been subject to changes and adaptation over the years as well as various repairs. In 2005, a major project to deal with all external fabric was undertaken followed by further substantial external work in 2011/12.

The current proposal to carry out external work to the original building follows this long sequence of repairs. It will enhance the fabric of the church building, and better sustain it into the future.

The values of the building's founders, and what was important to them, are expressed in the building's form and its architectural features. The cupola and its pedestal house a clock in the traditional way and they are an integral part of the building and play an important role:

- Symmetry - A clear straight line runs right through the building, from entrance door through to reredos beyond. The cupola sits on this line of symmetry.
- Focus - The cupola is an external focal point identifying the building and its entrance, drawing people towards the internal pulpit which was originally tall and visible from all pews in the gallery and Ground Floor. Such focus was on the 'word' as preached in sermon, which the cupola anticipates.
- Simplicity - Original elements of the building are few - porch, lobby and bell tower over, barrel vault, gallery, pulpit and vestry. The cupola supported in its pedestal is one of these features and its purpose easy to understand.



Image 4: interior of the Church - focused now on the reredos

3. ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Following the categories outlined in Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance, English Heritage (2008) the summary of heritage values of the separate elements of the building are set out below.

Significance Value			
Evidential	Externally the form and appearance of the main building remain intact. Most of the interior detailing is also original.	Local	Very High
Historical - Illustrative	Example of an early 19th century Georgian church	Regional	High
Historical - associative	Leslie Wright leased it to the congregation for a nominal rent and requested it should not be sold so long as there was a congregation to support it. St John's remains the only proprietary chapel in the diocese of London which is self-supporting.	Regional	Very High
Aesthetic	Classical style expressed through symmetry, focus and simplicity, both externally and internally with fine detailing.	Regional	Very High

Based on the table above it is clear that the St John's Downshire Hill is of very high heritage value.



Image 5: west facade of the Church



Image 6: south facade of the Church

4. THE CUPOLA

The cupola with its dome and side louvres, is constructed from timber, and clad in lead. Its pedestal is formed from a timber frame which is clad in render on all 4 sides.

The original render to the plinth and its key (assumed to originally be timber lath) has been removed over the years and repaced with a modern metal lath. So nothing original of the pedestal apart from its timber carcass remains. When this replacement was done is not known, but is suspected to be during the 1960s.

The lath is now rusty (see image 8), and the render badly damaged on the north west corner (see image 9). The upstand junction with the roof in itself is also a very weak detail and has been the subject of previous repairs to the timber internally.

The lath now needs to be replaced, the render repaired and the upstand improved, though to replace the lath will require all the render to be replaced. These necessary repairs give opportunity to improve the weathering of the junction of the roof and the render.



Image 7: North face of cupola



Image 8: rusting metal lath



Image 9: render damaged - base north west corner of cupola

5. PROPOSED WORKS

The proposal alterations are to:

- Remove all render and lath on the pedestal.
- Replace the lath with a stainless steel lath.
- Carry out any repairs to the timber carcass as required.
- Install a code 4, 150mm high, milled lead upstand flashing to all four sides of the pedestal following the roof lines.
- Rerender the pedestal using a hydraulic lime finishing on a stop bead.
- Decorate the render (to match) with a mineral paint.

The other options considered are to

1. Continue with, and replicate the existing detail - which is failing and has failed in the past; and will do nothing to improve the resilience of the fabric if retained.
2. Clad the whole of the pedestal in lead - which may provide a longer lasting solution but will have a far greater and potentially deleterious visual impact on the building.



Image 10 - existing arrangement

Image 11: details of the base

6. ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACT

6.1 Scale of change

No	Item and Impact description	Scale of Impact
A	Removal and replacement of existing render and lath <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neither materials are now original to the building Hydraulic lime will match No visual impact 	Negligible change
B	Introduction of a lead ustand flashing and render stop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited visual impact Vast improvement to the resilience of the fabric to damage by water 	Minor change

6.2 Conclusions

This is a necessary improvement; the options have been evaluated, and the chosen solution will do no damage to the significance of the building.

7. ACCESS STATEMENT

No access statement is required since the proposal only concerns the improvement of the fabric.

Significance / Scale of Impacts table

VALUE OF HERITAGE ASSET	SCALE & SEVERITY OF CHANGE/IMPACT (EITHER ADVERSE OR BENEFICIAL)				
	No Change	Negligible Change	Minor Change	Moderate Change	Major Change
Very High (Grade I/Scheduled Monument)	Neutral	Slight	Moderate/Large	Large/Very Large	Very Large
High (Grade II*)	Neutral	Slight	Moderate/Slight	Moderate/Large	Large/Very Large
Medium (Grade II/Conservation Area)	Neutral	Neutral/Slight	Slight	Moderate	Moderate/Large
Low (Locally Listed)	Neutral	Neutral/Slight	Neutral/Slight	Slight	Slight/Moderate
Negligible (Non-Designated)	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral/Slight	Neutral/Slight	Slight

Definition of types of change

No Change	Negligible Change	Minor Change	Moderate Change	Major Change
No material change to the heritage asset or its setting.	A small change or alteration, but unimportant. Having no visual or indirect impacts on the asset or its setting. Slight changes to use or access.	A small change to an element of fabric or setting that results in a noticeable difference. Limited indirect impacts or changes to character.	Changes to an element, including replacement, or insertion of a new element, where the asset or its setting has clearly been modified. Noticeable indirect impacts.	A change of great extent, including the complete removal of an element. Changes to most or all of the asset or its setting. Total alteration of the asset. Extreme indirect impacts.

9 point scale of impact

Major beneficial	Moderate beneficial	Minor beneficial	Negligible beneficial	Neutral	Negligible adverse	Minor adverse	Moderate adverse	Major adverse
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8. APPENDIX

8.1 Official list entry

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: I

List Entry Number: 1078270

Date first listed: 11-Aug-1950

Statutory Address 1: CHURCH OF ST JOHN, DOWNSHIRE HILL

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

[Understanding list entries](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/>)

[Corrections and minor amendments](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/>)

Location

Statutory Address: CHURCH OF ST JOHN, DOWNSHIRE HILL

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Greater London Authority

District: Camden (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference: TQ 26982 85697

Details

CAMDEN

TQ2685NE DOWNSHIRE HILL 798-1/27/341 (South side) 11/08/50 Church of St John

GVI

Church. 1818-23. Possibly by CR Cockerell or designed by its builder, William Woods. Stucco. Slated roof. Classical style. EXTERIOR: 5-bay aisled nave. Symmetrical west front with slightly projecting central pedimented bay having pilasters at angles and flanked by small wings with blind windows and parapets upswept towards the central pediment. Prostyle portico with penthouse roof and panel above inscribed "St. John's Downshire Hill"; arched doorway with panelled double doors. Flanking the entrance, arched round-arched windows to ground floor and arched oculi above. Pediment with clock. Appearing above the pediment a rectangular bell cupola with columns at angles carrying entablature and round-arched louvred openings. INTERIOR: particularly fine, with panelled galleries on 3 sides having 2 orders of slim cast-iron columns with enriched capitals. Tunnel-vaulted roof with simple coffers. Distyle-in-antis Corinthian reredos with inscribed entablature and arched and pedimented doorways in outer bays. East window above of Venetian type with pilastered architrave and patterned stained glass including the eagle of St John. North and south walls have segmental-arched windows with splayed soffits above and below galleries; rear of galleries has corresponding round-arched openings to allow light through. Box pews with umbrella stands on doors. HISTORICAL NOTE: built to serve the new middle-class surrounding development. In 1916 the freehold was bought by Leslie Wright who leased it to the congregation for a nominal rent. At his death he requested it should not be sold so long as there was a congregation to support it. St John's remains the only proprietary chapel in the diocese of London which is self-supporting.

Listing NGR: TQ2698285697

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: 477140

Legacy System: LBS

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.



Map

This map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. This copy shows the entry on 24-Feb-2022 at 13:06:22.

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End of official list entry

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