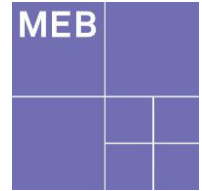


Ref 1251



ST JOHN'S DOWNSHIRE HILL

PROPOSED EXTENSION TO CHURCH AND CARETAKER'S FLAT



DESIGN, CONSERVATION AND ACCESS STATEMENT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 St John's Church, Downshire Hill, belongs to the more conservative Evangelical Anglican tradition of churches. Although there are many kinds of churches in this part of London, this tradition is not well represented. Nearest similar congregations are found in West Hampstead, Muswell Hill and Kilburn, or further afield in Regents Street, North Finchley, Barnet or Cockfosters.
- 1.2 The potential for growth has therefore been significant.
- 1.3 In 2005 a major development of the building was completed in anticipation of this growth and the Grade 1 listed fabric was simultaneously restored. An undercroft with lift access was developed to facilitate weekday activities; as well as a 1 bed staff flat; the external ground levels were substantially reduced so a new garden could be created; pews were reordered internally to provide flexibility; electrical services were upgraded, full heating was provided, and the structural defects, cracked renders/ internal plasters and decorations were all addressed and sorted.
- 1.4 The approvals for the work (both planning and listed building consent) were obtained and their references are:
- Planning consent: LWX0103577
 - Listed Building Consent: PWX0103576
- 1.5 As a result of this development, the premises now provide a better facility for the congregation, and the building has a much more sustainable future than it did before 2004.
- 1.6 10 years on, new needs have arisen as a result of that anticipated growth. An increasing size of congregation requires more facilities, particularly for young people on a Sunday morning. The small size of caretaker's flat (1 Bedroom) now limits the choice of caretaker to either a single person or a newly married couple, rather than a more mature couple.
- 1.7 This statement accompanies an application for works which will address these latest needs by proposing an extended building on the site of and adjoining the existing church.
- 1.8 This document therefore sets out what facilities need to be added, what are the options, which is best, what changes are therefore proposed, and the justification for these changes.
- 1.9 The building is Grade 1 listed, therefore an assessment is also made of the impact of the proposals on the building in the light of the original values implicit in the minds of the building's founders, its early users, and the outworking of this in a design, as well as its other inherent architectural qualities and setting.
- 1.10 Other planning issues arising from the extension are also assessed.

2.0 EXISTING ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMMODATION

2.1 St John's church is a fully functioning living and operating local church community. Current activities facilitated within the building include:

- Sunday services and coffee after - held twice on the day
- Weddings / wedding receptions and funeral services
- Occasional concerts
- Creche (available during services)
- Sunday School teaching for children
- Congregational meetings
- Lay training
- Conferences
- Weekday groups including Mums and Toddlers groups run by the church and 'After School' clubs
- English language classes
- Administration office with 6 full time staff and 1 part time
- Counselling
- Study and research

2.2 Shared meals are an important part of the church's activities and accompany both the Sunday evening service, and weekday evening meetings.

2.3 These activities take place in:

- A worship area - with moveable chairs and some box pews, a large dais / platform with baptistery, plus a gallery above, containing the organ. Capacity is 300 to 400.
- A large Hall divisible into two by a folding door, with attached kitchen and associated storage with access to a garden
- A separate meeting room that can accommodate about 25 people
- A vestry / office accessed via a main administrative office
- Front entrance lobby with stairs up to the gallery and down to Hall below
- 2 small study / office rooms

2.4 These activities are supported by appropriate toilet facilities, a kitchen and necessary boiler and ventilation plant rooms, with external car and bicycle parking, and (as declared above) the building is fully accessible.

2.5 A '1 Bed' Caretaker's Flat is incorporated within the volume of the church, and possesses an external 'Garden Room' Store.

3.0 CURRENT PROBLEMS IN USE AND OPTIONS AVAILABLE

3.1 The first need:

- 3.1.1 The church has grown in numbers over the past 10 years. In 2005 the congregation was approximately 70 adults and 20 children but in 2014 it is now currently 130 adults and 70 children.
- 3.1.2 An increasing size of congregation requires more meeting rooms for young people's activities on a Sunday morning.
- 3.1.3 Currently there are only four spaces available for children's groups (a main Hall - divisible into two rooms, a meeting room close to it, and a garden room which is very small and has no good access to a WC). One of these spaces is required for a crèche (20 children) leaving the other spaces for the remainder (an additional 50 children). This is now not enough to provide separate identifiable and private teaching areas for the age range shared between them (2.5 years to 14 years of age).
- 3.1.4 This need must be met by the provision of an additional room to accommodate a group of approx. 25-35 people, but it would need to be accessible from within the building (as distinct from going outside), and have better access to a toilet.

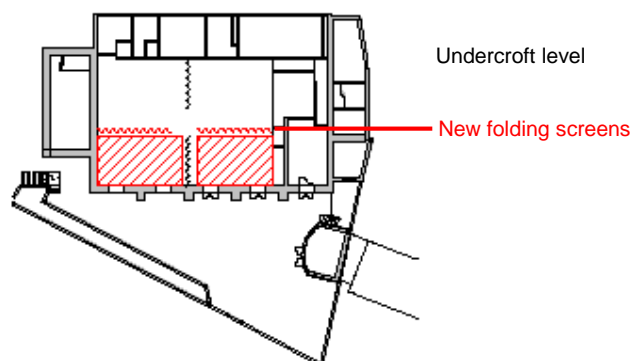
3.2 The second need:

- 3.2.1 The small size of caretaker's flat limits the choice of caretaker: to either a single person or a newly married couple. The ideal candidate would be a married person, but a single bedroom means they cannot have a family, or start a family and remain on site. This reduces the possibilities of finding a suitable person, or means that a married person must move on once a family comes along.
- 3.2.2 A second bedroom for the Caretaker's Flat is required. The church therefore must provide space for this further room.

3.3 This commentary now considers the various options available, in respect of how this can be best achieved.

3.4 Provision firstly of an additional room to meet 'Sunday School' group's requirements:

3.41 **Option A:** further subdivision of the main Hall into more areas using additional folding screens:



Pros

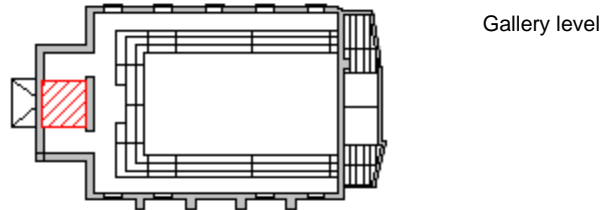
- Can provide a solution without needing to extend the building
- Alterations occur in part of the building that is not so historically sensitive

Cons

- Light / ventilation - the quality of the internal spaces will be low
- It will be necessary to go through one room to get to another

- There would be additional folding partitions
- The current configuration of building services (heating and ventilation), does not facilitate future sub-division.

3.4.2 **Option B:** conversion of the area currently occupied by the housing behind the organ at Gallery level



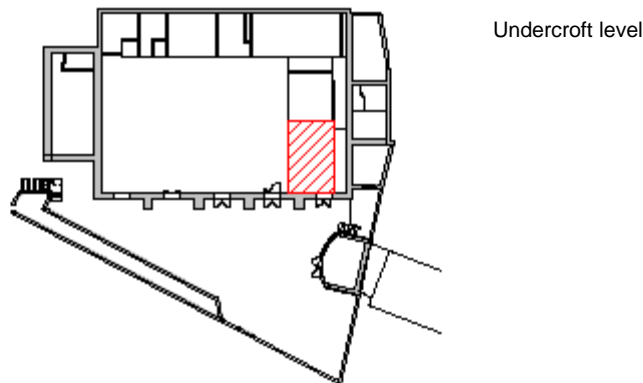
Pros

- No effect on the building's footprint

Cons

- Requires removal of at least the back of the organ, and possibly its console, with potential difficulties in gaining listed building consent
- Access to the room is compromised due to this proposed location by the need to negotiate steep steps with no landings
- No natural light: the clock tower above would preclude the possibility of introducing a rooflight.
- Size of resulting room is too small to accommodate 25 people

3.4.3 **Option C:** connect to the Caretaker's flat from the Hall and 'borrow' the Living Area in the Flat on occasions



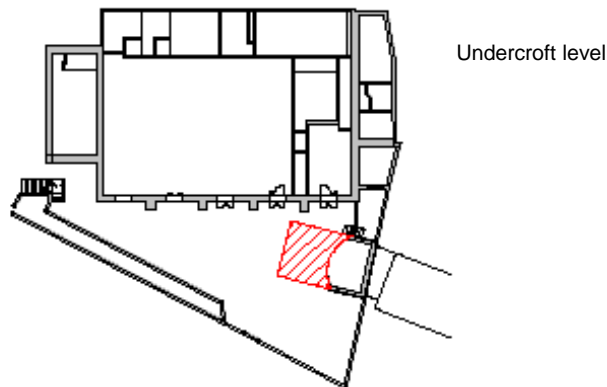
Pros

- All accommodation is within the existing building envelope, at the right level and a toilet would be available.
- Alterations occur in part of the building that is not so historically sensitive

Cons

- This is an imposition on the caretaker's private living room making it necessary to displace caretaker's accommodation on occasions
- Storage space for the Hall is reduced
- Circulation within flat is affected; a possible corridor might need to be added, there will be less wall space in the living room, and additionally, space would need to be found for a relocated kitchen.

3.4.4 Option D: enlargement of the existing 'Garden Room'



Pros

- The building exists, so there is precedent for a detached pavilion. The footprint would need to be increased but there is space to do this without affecting the garden significantly.
- A direct connection from the church might be possible, without going outside the building.
- A toilet could be incorporated.

Cons

- Existing drainage will need to be protected or rerouted
- A carefully considered design will be necessary so as not to impact on amenities of neighbour's properties, or damage the setting

3.5.1 Provision secondly in respect of additional caretaker's accommodation

3.5.1 Option E: The church purchases or rents alternative accommodation in the locality

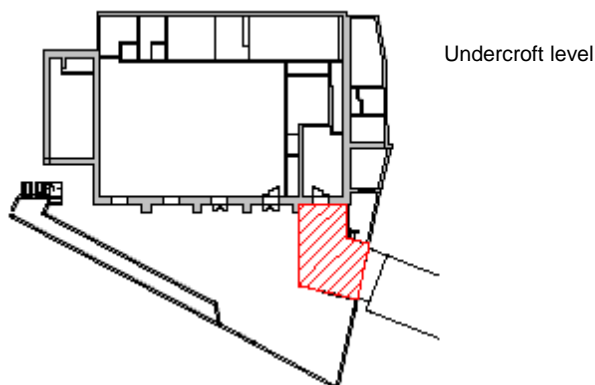
Pros

- Would free up floor area to provide additional youth/meeting space

Cons

- Local property prices are prohibitively high
- Local property rents are prohibitively high
- Caretaker would live off site, possibly far away. The ability to manage, secure and monitor the building would be compromised.

3.5.2 Option F: Construction of an extension in lieu of the existing 'Garden Room'



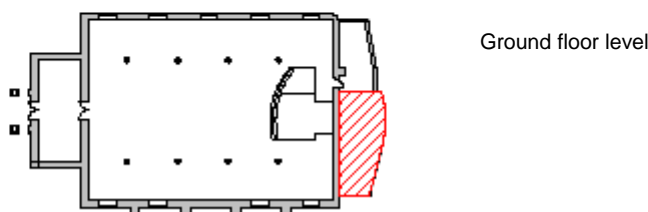
Pros

- Enables the caretaker to remain on site.

Cons

- A carefully considered design will be necessary so as not to impact on amenities of neighbour's properties or damage the setting

3.5.3 **Option G:** Extend flat within the church – e.g. into the vestry or office over at the east end of building



Pros

- Location is adjacent to the flat

Cons

- Space will need to be found for the displaced office accommodation. A possibility might be the space adjacent to the organ (as 4.4.2 above), but this is far removed from current office location and entrance to the building, would be more difficult to use, and would be inaccessible to those with mobility impairments.
- Further space would be required for an internal staircase within the dwelling, which would reduce any space gained.
- The alterations would affect older more historic parts of the building.

3.6 Conclusions / Recommendations

3.6.1 Option A will not provide good quality additional rooms and is technically very difficult - requiring the floor to be dug up and large vent ducts and underfloor heating to be altered. And the room would be out of operation for a period.

3.6.2 Heritage considerations mean that any new proposals should take place at Undercroft level. This discounts options B and G.

3.6.3 Options C and E reduce the likelihood of finding a 'hands on' Caretaker and limit the likely applicants for this important role

3.6.4 Options D and F can effectively combine the requirements for an additional meeting area, and a larger flat without impact on the existing internal fabric and will still leave a substantial garden amenity. These two options if combined provide the preferred solution, though careful design will be required so that there is no impact on the setting of the listed building, nor damage to its character.

3.7 A single storey extension of two rooms linked to the church would provide a second bedroom (potentially en-suited), and a meeting room which could also function as additional space for the Flat if not required for Church group meetings on Sunday mornings.

3.8 It is this proposal - combining options B and G - that has been taken forward to the design submitted.

4.0 TIMELINE OF ALTERATIONS TO THE BUILDING

4.1 The church building has been subject to many change over the years. Reasons are not always known but the following changes have been identified by investigation, record, or recent work:

4.2 Externally these include:

- Porch roof – original shape altered, steps replaced, and pitch introduced (date unknown).
- Vestry extended to the north - accommodating a boiler flue and WC (date unknown).
- Current east window introduced (1882).
- Buttresses added on the south elevation (1896).
- Glazed screens and doors introduced at the back of the worship area (1968).
- Fabric lost: the swags and rosettes on the porch, and the acroteria and pinnacles on the pediment - if the 1843 and other representations of the front elevation of the church are correct - have also been lost.
- If these representations are correct, a painted sign introduced to the recessed panel above the porch and the circular window glazing bars altered.
- Development of an undercroft - the opportunity (following excavations to strengthen the foundations) taken to provide the space required for the majority of the ancillary accommodation needed in a modern church building (2004).
- Undercroft windows installed to provide daylight and ventilation and access to the garden on the south side of the building (2004).
- Front doors - altered to open out to provide a safer exit for large numbers of people in the event of a fire (2004).
- Inner front doors - a draught lobby installed to make the entrance lobby comfortable, safe, welcoming and suitable for activities other than circulation (e.g. reception) (2004).
- Vestry extension (north side) - an extension added to provide a weekday reception area to the church's offices, and stairs down to the undercroft (2004).
- Vestry extension (south side) - and extension added at both levels (2004).
- LEB substation replaced with new Garden Room (2004).
- Light wells – to provide light and ventilation to north side of the undercroft (2004).
- Landscape - trees and planting to recover full use of the garden originally provided as part of the site and provide a useable amenity for the new under-croft and dwelling (2004).
- Glass to windows to Worship Area replaced (2004).
- External redecorations (2004).
- External alterations to cover parapet copings with lead (2011).

4.3 And internally these include:

- Doors introduced and paneling extended at top of the stairs to the gallery (date unknown).
- Organ introduced and 'terraces' at back of gallery reduced to either side (1873).
- Original pulpit removed and replaced (presumed both in 1896).
- Dais, table, small benches and rails introduced at front of the worship area (1896).
- Pews and plinths repositioned (1896).
- Glazed screens and doors introduced at the back of the worship area (1968).
- Fabric lost: including includes many box pews at ground floor level and the original doors to the worship area.

- There have also been hidden structural changes to the building over the years to strengthen the roof, support the ground floor, and heat the building.
- Stairs down to undercroft - a pair of stairs in the entrance lobby area introduced to allow internal access to the undercroft from ground floor worship area level providing a passage down, and up, for large numbers of people to / from the main entrance (2004).
- Platform lift – to provide wheelchair access between floors (2004).
- Glass doors to worship area - the existing heavy solid doors of 1968 replaced with glazed doors to allow views into the worship area upon entry to the building (2004).
- GF pews - repositioned to allow modern forms of worship, and the box pews made more comfortable (2004).
- Dais extension and new pulpit - a proper sized raised platform installed to provide visibility and space necessary to lead services, for a music group, and for dance and drama, and a flexible pulpit (2004).
- Worship Area floor replaced (2004).
- Back of gallery - the doors at the top of the stairs replaced to form two study rooms (2004).
- New Services – new heating and lighting systems (2004).
- Internal redecoration (2004).
- Further roof strengthening - required to retain the building's stability in the long term following structural engineer's survey (2004).

4.4 This proposal which is to carry out work to the building and its site, therefore follows a long tradition of change and adaptation since the building was first constructed in 1823, enhances the life of the church community, and allows the accommodation to respond to contemporary needs.

5.0 HERITAGE CONSIDERATIONS AND DESIGN RESPONSE

- 5.1 St Johns was built in 1823. The building arose as a result of development of housing into the area of Hampstead at that time.
- 5.2 The aspirations of the building's founders, hence what was important and therefore now historically significant, were expressed by the following:
- 5.2.1 Self-government - The building was built as a proprietary chapel where minister and congregation avoided outside control. At one stage there was a legal battle to retain this privilege (which threatened the continued existence of the church). The building is not a shrine, nor seat of church government, and does not have any responsibility for a parish. Its members choose who to appoint and what to do.
 - 5.2.2 Self-support - The building as a proprietary chapel meant the minister was supported by pew rents (which continued up to 1951) and donations from his congregation. The congregation has always taken full responsibility for repairs and alterations without denominational help.
 - 5.2.3 Children's work - The early ministry of the church involved the purchase of nearby rooms for a Sunday school - used latterly for other meetings. These buildings are now in different ownership but their original purpose demonstrated a particular concern to serve poorer families.
 - 5.2.4 The priority of teaching and importance of the 'word' - There are many biblical texts and injunctions written inside the building to remind the congregation of the centrality of the 'Word of God' as a basis for behaviour and living. Many of the early ministers wrote religious books and had literary interests.
 - 5.2.5 Evangelical traditions - The building was not a place for ritual or for 'sacred' spaces. It was an auditorium where a man with a message could deliver it, and where people could gather to listen. The changes to the building by Horace Fields lowered and repositioned the pulpit off the line of symmetry, and introduced an altar with communion rails – both of which detracted from these original traditions by reducing the emphasis on the 'Word' and introducing the altar as a 'special' space.
 - 5.2.6 Community - The building belongs to the local community providing it with a focus and a facility. It is elegant but does not carry the name or cultural 'baggage' of an architect of historical stature. It has the scale of the larger London houses that surround it, sits in a residentially prominent position, and was given a garden.
 - 5.2.7 Support of missions - Although this is not relevant to Hampstead in particular, a concern by minister and congregation for the needs of the wider world has been part of the culture of the church which valued 'service' - in particular to those less 'well off'. As a facility this building has served the community in the widest possible sense.
 - 5.2.8 These aspirations were converted into the building's architecture where the following elements stand out:
 - 5.2.9 Symmetry - A clear straight line runs right through building from the entrance door through the position of the original pulpit to the vestry beyond. The

symmetry was upset by the revision to the location of the pulpit (Horace Fields), and by the addition of the WC to the north side of the vestry.

- 5.2.10 Focus - The building focused on a pulpit that was originally tall - being visible from all pews in the gallery. The focus was on the 'word' as preached - backed up by the texts and writing that form part of the decoration. This focus was strengthened by the symmetry (from entrance to pulpit). There is no altar recess for it was not necessary to encounter God in a special place. Originally the pulpit would have hidden any altar recess.
- 5.2.11 Simplicity - Original elements of the building are few - porch, lobby, bell tower, barrel vault, gallery, pulpit and vestry - and their composition is easy to understand. The building is an auditorium simply reached and simply but elegantly stated. Volume does not overpower; the building was about a message and its means of delivery.
- 5.2.12 Ornamentation and relief of the main façade - The 1843 representation of the building shows an embellished front facade with a tall Doric porch, oriental pinnacles, acroteria, swags and rosettes. Combined with deeply recessed doors and mouldings these features show that the most prominent elevation was considered the most important. This is not repeated (the side elevations are much simpler). Many of these features have been lost. To say this was because the original embellishments were too ornate is conjecture, but they were not valued enough to be replaced or restored - and the front elevation, although retaining its original elegance, through this lack of explicit ornamentation is more barren. There is an argument that the building is better without these original features because it is simpler and more focused.



Front elevation of St Johns as now exists

6.0 DESIGN RESPONSE

- 6.1 The existing elevations of the church as the setting for the proposed extension are simple and plain: rendered masonry walls painted and incised to resemble stone, with its symmetrically ordered voids providing openings for windows and doors. Included on the elevations are simple mouldings, cornices and parapets. The focus is on the front elevation with a more moulded façade, and its pitched roof porch over the main entrance. The buttresses on the south elevation are not original, but a later addition required to stabilise the structure.
- 6.2 No 24 Keats Grove is a similarly simple but elegant symmetrical residential façade using a similar language with modern accretive extensions on each side,
- 6.3 It has been noted that the church was originally given a garden beside Keats Grove. This was at a higher level and has been reduced to a level that suits the new undercroft built in 2005 (refer drawing 1251/120). The external surfaces were made more durable with harder more useful finishes for children's outside activities during the week. Planting is now maturing and adds to the charm of the site.
- 6.4 The approach to the design of the extension has been to leave the original south elevation of the building alone as far as possible, and keep it visible, using a glazed link with fine lined metal framing to provide the connection to the new, and to provide articulation between old and new. The glazed link allows the whole of the original south elevation including its undercroft extensions to remain visible and still be enjoyed. And it allows the Living Room of the Flat with its limited aspect to still be lit and ventilated without loss.
- 6.5 The new building will also have a single story, so the original south elevation remains visible from Keats Grove. The mass of the new building is constructed in what was until 2005 mostly earth, and upon which stood a utilitarian electricity substation (removed in 2004).
- 6.6 The solid enclosures of the new building is given a considered simplicity which interprets the original adjacent building in a similarly simple but modern manner, by using contemporary materials. The enclosure will have the appearance of solid rendered walls (un-lined) 'holes' in walls for timber framed windows and doors, a parapet and shallow pitched natural slate roof behind a parapet. A 'contrast' would not be appropriate.
- 6.7 The new extension is not designed to compete with the existing church, nor slavishly copy it. Interest is added by following the line of the buttress through the new building with a glazed screen where its angle changes. And windows area used at this level rather than doors
- 6.8 The building is also articulated to 24 Keats Grove with a similar glazed screen that provides the escape door that will be needed from the bedroom.
- 6.9 The garden amenity is mostly retained and the extent of the new building limited to two bays to retain most of the amenity. One ornamental tree is lost. Original paving slabs from the original undercroft reused as stepping stones to the existing Garden Room are reused again as 'stepping stones' for the escape door from the bedroom.

7.0 IMPACT OF DESIGN ON HISTORIC FABRIC AND SETTING

7.1 An assessment of the impact of the new building on the existing building and its setting is provided by asking the 5 questions that follow:

7.2 Is the principle of development of the site in the proposed location acceptable?

7.2.1 Yes: the need is demonstrated, and the solution is the best combination of the possible options. It also occurs in the least visible part of the site so limits any impact on the existing building and street scene.

7.2.2 Yes: there already is a building (the Garden Room) in this location, which replaced an earlier electrical substation; the proposed extension is limited in height, its plan contained; it is constructed well below the historical ground levels along the south side of the building; and public enjoyment of this south side of the church building is retained.

7.2.3 Yes: the accretive addition (the traditional way churches develop) reflects the multiplicity of building shapes and forms in Keats Grove, some of which variously exhibit extensions of similar volume and eclectic character.

7.2.4 Yes: existing external amenities and planting are retained, allowing the outside play area for the Hall in the undercroft to remain, as well as a small private garden and patio for the Caretaker (which improves its amenity).

7.3 Does the development have a good narrative with the past?

7.3.1 Yes: there is a history of alteration and development of the building and site.

7.3.2 Yes: the proposed use of the new building respects the original intentions of the purpose of the public benefit of the church: to work with children, to teach, and to facilitate the local community.

7.3.3 Yes: the design concept of the new building reflects and interprets the simplicity of the architecture of the original building, yet still provides visual interest. It has a symmetrical elevation facing the outside amenity areas that mirrors in a small way the main entrance elevation of the church; and it is not ornamented.

7.4 Is the scale and proportion of the new building suitable?

7.4.1 Yes: the building is a small accretive addition and makes no impact on the original historic south elevation of the church, and is rarely visible from Keats Grove given the planting and landscaping.

7.4.2 The forms of the openings are proportionate to the solid walls and parapets.

7.5 Are the details appropriate?

7.5.1 Yes: given the design approach to provide a simple but interesting addition.

7.6 Will the materials be acceptable?

7.6.1 Yes: the materials reflect the original building and other houses in Keats Grove, and interpret them in a modern way,

7.6.2 Materials must be easy for a church to maintain, and will be.

8.0 OTHER PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Aside from issues related to the historic environment, final planning matters to consider in this statement concern the impact of the proposed development on neighbour's properties.
- 8.2 Sunlight and daylight etc.: because the proposed building is only single storey, there will be no impact of these natural amenities on 24 Keats Grove, nor the garden and south facing aspect of 45 Downshire Hill or beyond.
- 8.3 The views from the south facing rooms of 45 Downshire Hill, through the gap between no 24 Keats Grove and St John's Church will also not be obstructed as the gap will not be filled.
- 8.4 There will be no requirement to provide additional parking for the increase in size of the caretaker's flat.
- 8.5 Sustainability and the environment: there will be no loss of wildlife habitat, and the construction of the new extension can comply with the current requirements of Part L of the building regulations.

9.0 ACCESS

- 9.1 The proposed extension will be on the same floor level as the existing church, and the existing caretaker's flat. There will therefore be level access into the existing building. And that will make the 'facilities' of the church and hall (including accessible WC and lift) available to the extension.
- 9.2 The meeting room will be as accessible as any other room in the Undercroft, though it may be necessary to provide assistance through the previously external but now internal existing glass and shutter doors to the Hall. Any alterations to these doors would be insensitive to the design of the doors along this historic south elevation, so there is no proposal to change these doors, and if this is ever were to become a problem there is another meeting room of similar size available at this level that can be used instead.
- 9.3 Access to the new meeting room will become better than existing access to the Garden Room for any wheelchair users. It will no longer be necessary to go outside and negotiate gravel finish, grass and stepping stones.
- 9.4 Access to the new bedroom for the Caretaker will be the same standard as access to the living room of the dwelling unit which is a split level unit.