

WEST HAMPSTEAD: St James' Church – Application for Planning Consent for installation of Solar Panels and Replacement Rainwater Goods

Design and Access Statement, with Heritage Statement and Photos

Revision A - February 2022

Introduction

This document has been prepared on behalf of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of the Parish of St Mary with All Souls, Kilburn and St James' West Hampstead and is submitted in support of an application for planning consent. As the church is Grade II listed, a separate application for Approval/Faculty is being sought from the London Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and therefore has ecclesiastical exemption (i.e. listed building consent is not required).

Heritage Statement

Background/History

The church is listed Grade II. The site is in (at the western edge) the South Hampstead Conservation Area.

The church of St James' West Hampstead was built in 1887-8 to designs by noted Victorian ecclesiastical architect, Sir Arthur William Blomfield. The design is a very good example of the Gothic revival style. The church is built of soft red brick with dressed stone features (quoins, door and window surrounds, gable copings, strings, etc). The main roofs are covered with plain tiles. The Vestry, which projects to the Southeast, has a flat roof behind a parapet.

The church is situated on a corner site, the east elevation faces onto the busy and mainly commercial West End Lane (B510), the North elevation, where the main entrance is located, faces onto the more residential Sherriff Road. The South elevation faces toward the side elevations and gardens of adjacent Victorian terrace houses. The church is large and handsome, and the NE corner, with its tall chancel gable and projecting apsidal chapel, creates a strong presence in the neighbourhood.

The English Heritage listing is brief and only describes the exterior in terms of shape and materials (incorrectly stating that the roofs are slate). Most of the listing text refers to the interior features.

The parish has great pride in their church, as well as the grounds in which it sits, and have admirably maintained the building and grounds, undertaking various repairs and other projects ranging from creating a disabled access ramp, automated doors and a major reordering project internally to include a post office branch, café and children's play area. In addition to its regular church services, St James' is also a lively and much used centre for the community.

Proposals - Solar Panels

In late 2020 the church approached a specialist firm, Treadlighter, to investigate if solar panels on their roof would be of benefit. As mentioned above, the building is busy and is much used

throughout the day as well as at other times. The resulting analysis was that the panels would provide a great benefit to the church by both reducing their energy bills and, consequently, shrinking their carbon footprint. To 'go green' is very much on everyone's minds and lips and the parish recognise their environmental responsibilities. As the roofs are much in need of repairs in any case, and as the south facing roofs are neither visible nor important, the opportunity is being taken to both replace these roofs and introduce the solar panels.

The proposals include stripping the tiles from the South roof of the Nave (fully) and South Aisle roof (partially) to install new solar panels. These panels would be installed 'in-line' meaning set within the line of the roof with the upper face only just protruding above the line of the tiles. This is as opposed to solar panels on a raised framework fixed above the roof tiles. The 'in-line' system would be less obtrusive and would eliminate the need for future inevitable repairs to tiled roofs under raised solar panels. To the Nave roof there would be a small border of plain tiles to the perimeter. The ridges and eaves details would remain unchanged.

The roofs which to which the solar panels are proposed to be placed are both south facing roofs, which is the most efficient and beneficial orientation. At St James' these south roofs are virtually impossible to see from the public roads and pavements and would only be visible from a few neighbouring properties' windows or gardens. As such the impact is minimal and the historic character of the church unaffected.

Proposals - Rainwater Goods

As the work will require scaffolding, the opportunity is to be taken to replace all the rainwater goods at the church. The existing cast-iron rainwater goods (gutters and downpipes) are in a very poor condition and leaking in many areas, causing staining and damp to walls below. Repairs have been regular and are costly, due to the relative inaccessibility of most of the rainwater goods. In addition, the gutters are undersized and unable to cope with the increasingly frequent and heavy rains we are experiencing. The opportunity is to be taken to replace the rainwater goods with powder-coated cast aluminium from the Alumasc company, from their Heritage range, but with a slightly larger profile of gutter. Powder coated would mean less maintenance as repainting will no longer be necessary. The profiles will be similar to the existing. Any existing decorative hoppers (there is one at the East elevation) will be retained, redecorated and reused.

The colour of the new rainwater goods would be black, as are the existing.

The general appearance of the church would not be affected and the slightly different gutter profiles will not make a noticeable difference. The number and position of downpipes would remain as existing. The character of the church would not be diminished and the proposals would not cause harm. The new rainwater goods would allow for the church to be able to better protected in future by providing many years of maintenance-free service. As such the proposals are intended to preserve and enhance the building.

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The proposals seek to improve the existing amenity of the church by providing economical energy (solar panels) and better protection from adverse weather patterns (new gutters and downpipes). The ability to shrink one's carbon footprint and reliance on fossil fuels is also a great consideration.

Undertaking the works will better prepare the parish to thrive in the future and continue in its mission, while also remaining a much-loved focus for the community.

Aesthetics

In these proposals the solar panels are shown on the south roofs which would be both most practical and less visible. The appearance of the church when viewed from the public sides will therefore not be affected. The proposed new gutters and downpipes will be a close match to the existing and not affect the general appearance while providing increased benefits. Whilst undertaking these works, the opportunity will also be taken to undertake minor brickwork repairs and repointing to high level areas thus conserving the church fabric, while improving the general appearance.

Assessment of Impacts

As stated in above paragraphs, the impact of the proposals will be minimal. The significance of the heritage asset will not be altered while the public benefit will be improved. The proposals do not adversely affect the special character of the building or setting. Cabling for the solar panels would be neatly fixed to the less visible South and West elevations and the proposed equipment located in the adjacent St James' Hall building, as shown on the drawings.

The amount of development is minimal. No increased floor space is being created.

Access

There is existing level access into the church and no changes are proposed. There are no proposed changes to vehicular access or parking.

Conclusion

The proposals, in summary, seek to provide benefit to the church with solar panels and renewed rainwater goods, in conjunction with fabric repairs, while minimising harm. If undertaken, these proposals would conserve and enhance this important heritage asset and the wider conservation area in which it sits while providing renewable energy for this much-used building.

Policies

NPPF Policy 2: Delivering Sustainable Development:

The overarching objective of the policy is for ensuring development is sustainable and brought forward through the planning system. The emphasis is on good design in all new development and to reject design that is 'inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions'.

The proposals seek to demonstrate good design in that the exterior alterations are not easily visible and would include conservation and restoration of the fabric. Internally, the alterations are of low impact and reversible.

The proposals seek to improve energy efficiency, thus providing sustainability as regards environmental objectives.

NPPF Policy 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment:

The government's objective for the historic environment is set out in the policy and establishes the need for decision-making which is based on an understanding of the particular significance of any heritage assets that may be affected by proposed development. The policy also emphasises the need for the historic environment to remain a living and integral part of the local scene through the

pro-active and intelligent management of heritage assets. Change is acknowledged as sometimes desirable to facilitate viable uses that can better provide for long-term conservation.

The proposals would not diminish the significance of the building and seek to provide a viable future through green energy systems and reduced running costs (solar panels) and conserving the fabric from deterioration (renewal of rainwater goods and minor brickwork repairs).

Harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals in that it helps secure the optimum viable use of the building in the interests of its long term conservation.

Best practice for repair and alteration will be used. There is a general preference for reusing material in order to retain authenticity and ensure that the repairs are sympathetic. The approach, overall, would be to favour removing material only when absolutely necessary, or where significance may be enhanced, and use materials and techniques that are sympathetic to the existing fabric.

South Hampstead Conservation Area – Character Appraisal and Management Strategy (Feb 2011)

The unique and interesting qualities of the Conservation area will not be harmed by the proposals. The special characteristics of architecturally varied roofscapes and picturesque massing of buildings will not be affected. There will be no change to the valued open spaces and verdant character which characterises the Conservation Area. The proposals seek to preserve and enhance the building while promoting green and viable energy sources in conjunction with careful conservation and repairs. The limited visibility of the proposals mean that harm is minimised.

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General Photographs



PHOTO 1 (above): General view of the Northeast corner of the church from West End Lane



Photo 2 (above): East elevation, facing West End Lane. Existing houses to south visible to the left.



PHOTO 3 (above): View of the Southeast corner. South roof of Nave and South Aisle just visible.



PHOTO 4 (above): Similar view to photo 4, but taken from across the street.



PHOTO 5 (above): Southeast corner of Nave and South Aisle
Photo taken standing in church grounds.