

10. FULL APPLICATION – SINGLE STOREY EXTENSION TO FORM A MEETING ROOM, SMALL BREW AREA, STORAGE AND LAVATORY AT ST CHRISTOPHER'S CHURCH SHRIGLEY ROAD, POTT SHRIGLEY, (NP/CEC/1215/1153, P.10305, 394469/379169, 4/12/2015/JK)

Applicant: Mr Duncan Matheson

Site and Surroundings

St Christopher's Church is a Grade I Listed Church situated within the village of Pott Shrigley at the junction of Shirley Road, Bakestonedale Road and Spuley Lane. The main access and Lych Gate faces Spuley Lane and comes off the back of a small cobbled parking area which also serves the adjacent Church Cottages (listed Grade II) to the south of the Churchyard. Pott Shrigley primary school and village Hall lie across Spuley Lane to the east and are also listed grade II. To the north of the church, across Shrigley Road, there are further residential dwellings. To the west side of the churchyard between the churchyard and Shrigley Road there is a triangular block of trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order at the end of which is an access off the road leading to the village events field. In the end of the woodland there is an informal unsurfaced parking area for around two vehicles close to the west entrance into the churchyard.

The church dates mainly from the C15 and is constructed from coursed sandstone rubble under a stone-slate roof. The list description describes it *having 'nave and aisles of 2 bays, chancel, west tower and small south porch. Angle buttresses and rolled copings, 2 and 3-light windows of various forms, some with hood moulds ending in large stops carved as heads. West tower of 4 stages with deeply set west doorway and 2-light, louvred, bell opening; castellated parapet and pinnacles.'* The most recent alteration to the church was the addition around 1999 of a small single storey extension off the northern elevation to provide a WC with small vestibule which doubles as a "brew station".

Within the churchyard on the south side of the church is a standing cross which is a scheduled ancient monument. The whole of the site lies within the Pott Shrigley Conservation Area.

Proposal

The application seeks planning permission for a single storey extension off the north-west corner of the Church and joined to the existing WC extension. This would provide a meeting room (capacity for 40 sitting, 60 standing) accessed via new entrance lobby with external door and internal link into the church. At the back of the new entrance lobby link there would be a small store room and WC. The link into the church would be via the existing vestibule of the 1999 WC extension.

The extension would be constructed from with materials to match the church. The main meeting room element would have a rectangular plan and be approx. 8.7m long by 5.5m. It would abut the boundary wall to Shrigley Road with eaves set just below the parapet coping of the churchyard wall. It would be spaced off from the church and tower by 1.8m and 2.7m respectively. The entrance lobby/link element would wrap around the angled buttress on the NE corner of the main church and connect through to the existing toilet/vestibule with a part lean-to roof against the church building. An existing window in the 1999 extension lost to the new link corridor would be relocated from the west to the east elevation of the existing WC extension. Due to the differing roof heights between the proposal and the existing WC extension a small timber clad projecting gable/vent would be formed above the ridge of the existing WC extension.

The west gable end of the extension would be fitted with a single oak planked door abutting a three light stone mullioned window opening fitted with divided double glazed timber frames. On the south elevation there would be a run of 2 No three-light, and 1 No two-light mullioned windows interspaced with ashlar panels to match the ashlar stone quoins and gable coping. The external entrance door would be an oak planked door set within an oak framed glazed screen above a low stone plinth wall.

The footprint of the meeting room would require the relocation of two gravestones as well as the existing northern pedestrian entrance off Shrigley Road. Plans show the gravestones would be re-laid flat as part of a proposed stone paved path around the new extension. A small self-set tree beside the boundary wall will be removed. The canopy and root protection area of an existing yew tree would partly overlap the footprint of the proposed extension.

Plans also show the informal parking area at the end of the TPO woodland being formalised to create 2 No accessible parking spaces, although it should be noted that this area is outside the application site area. It is however within the ownership of the church.

The application is supported by a Heritage Statement, Design & Access statement and Arboricultural Assessment.

There is no separate application for listed building consent for the proposed works because, as a church property, the building benefits from an ecclesiastical exemption meaning such issues are dealt with via a separate faculty application to the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reason.

- 1. The proposed development would harm the significance of the Grade I St Christopher's Church. In the absence of sufficient public benefits which could outweigh the harm that has been identified it is therefore considered that approval of the proposal would be contrary to Core Strategy policy GSP1, GSP3 and L3, Local Plan policies LC4, LC5, LC6 and the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposal therefore fails to conserve and enhance the special interest and setting of the church contrary to Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.**
- 2 Harm to Pott Shrigley Conservation Area contrary to Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and paragraphs 131 and 132 of the NPPF as well as policy LC5 of the Local Plan.**
- 3 In the absence of an appropriate archaeological field evaluation to establish significance and impact of the proposed works, acceptance of the application fails to meet the information requirements of both PDNPA policy at LC16 and NPPF para 128.**
- 4 Inadequate information (out of date arboricultural assessment) to properly assess impact upon trees affected by the proposed development.**

Key Issues

- Whether the proposed development would conserve the significance of the Grade I listed Church, its setting and the setting of nearby listed buildings within the designated Pott Shrigley Conservation Area.

- The impact upon highway safety.
- The impact upon trees both within the churchyard and those outside covered by a tree preservation order.

Relevant Planning History

1998 – Planning permission refused for a single storey extension on the NW corner of the church to provide vestry, toilet and vestibule. The proposal was very similar, although smaller, to the current proposal. The reasons for refusal were that the position, form and detailing of the proposed extension were *“considered to be totally unacceptable.....as it would not only dominate the north and west elevations of the property but also part of the historical fabric of the building....the resulting adverse effect of the proposal on this fine Grade I listed building is considered to be totally unacceptable.”*

The Authority’s Historic Buildings Architect advised that a small extension positioned to the east of the diagonal corner buttress, without touching it, and extending north to the boundary wall, would be more appropriate and acceptable. As a result, the following application for the existing toilet and vestibule was subsequently approved in 1999.

1999 – Planning permission granted for a small extension close to the north west corner of church to provide WC and small vestibule.

2012 – Pre-application planning enquiry regarding an extension of the NW corner of the church. Officers advised that they could not envisage an acceptable proposal with an extension in the current proposed location. It was noted that gravestones will have to be relocated and bodies exhumed and reburied. The new extension would also visually obstruct the west window of the north aisle and form a dead space that would be difficult to maintain as it would be sandwiched between the east wall of the extension and west wall of the north aisle. The new meeting room would detract from the west tower when viewed from the churchyard and harm the setting of the structure, There would also be a poor relationship between the existing roofs and the roof of the new building. The proposed roof will be higher than the 1990s north extension resulting in an awkward detail. Officers were also concerned about the narrow roof proposed from eaves level of the north aisle, wrapping round one of the buttresses, to meet the roofs of the lower buildings and had reservations about the long continuous roof, that will be visible from the roadside.

2015 – Pre-planning enquiry regarding the proposed extension advised that the proposal was similar to previous enquiries in 2012 and alongside the same objections it was considered that the enquirer had not adequately explored the alternatives to attaching an extension on this part of the church.

2016 – Various tree works agreed with the Authority within the Churchyard to manage overgrown trees and clear scrub.

Consultations

Highway Authority – No objections

Notes that concerns have been raised in relation to the absence of off-street parking for visitors to the Church and parking congestion generally within Pott Shrigley. The Design and Access Statement (DAS) sets out that a number of the meetings the proposed extension is designed to accommodate, either currently take place within the Church, the nearby Village Hall or in people’s houses, none of which have associated off-street parking for the number of attendees indicated in the DAS. Concludes that traffic generation associated with the meetings expected to

take place in the proposed extension would not be expected to have a material impact on the existing parking conditions within Pott Shrigley.

Highway Rights of Way officer - the development does not appear to affect a public right of way.

District Council – No response to date.

Parish Council – Unable to reach a conclusion not having sufficient expertise to judge the architectural aspects of alterations to a Grade 1 listed building. However the room appears to be in the least obtrusive position if it is to be attached to the church and it is of a reasonable design. The Council's great concern is the lack of any parking provision and the likelihood that the worst situations will occur when the Church and the School are running events or activities concurrently. It was noted that the Village Hall is available to provide a suitable venue for additional activities outside school hours and terms.

Historic England – No objections – Recommend that the public benefits of the scheme are weighed against the minor level of harm which would occur to the significance of St Christopher's, in line with paragraph 134 of the NPPF. Comments that:

“St Christopher's Church in Pott Shrigley is a small, stone built parish church at the heart of a picturesque village. The building is compact in form, with a comparably large tower and was mostly constructed in the 15th century in the perpendicular style. It has escaped extensive remodelling except for the addition of the south porch in the early 20th century and a small extension in 2001, built to accommodate toilets. The high significance of the church is recognised in its designation as a grade I listed building, placing it in the top 4% of listed buildings in the county.

The surrounding village of Pott Shrigley is designated as a conservation area and includes a number of heritage assets such as the school and village hall, Pott Hall Farmhouse and Church Cottages, all of which are grade II listed. The church is at the centre of the settlement and conservation area, with the principle route way through sweeping up from the south before turning to head west. Located adjacent to this road, the church complex is defined by a stone wall which runs east west, whilst the historic churchyard stretches down to the south and includes a number of tombs and a listed cross.

The Church and its graveyard are not only significant in their own right as an important example of a relatively unaltered 15th century small parish church, located within its historic graveyard, it also forms a fundamental part of the character of Pott Shrigley and is a key building within the settlement.

The proposals have been the subject of pre-application discussions with ourselves and having carefully considered the proposals and their justification, we have stated our support for the scheme as recommended in Historic England's guidance document 'New Work in Historic places of Worship'. The application includes a statement of need. The justification for the additional facilities of a meeting room, brew space, storage and further toilet is detailed within this and has been previously accepted by ourselves, as we support the efforts of congregations to keep their places of worship in use wherever practical and we welcome proposals for additional facilities which will help sustain the buildings in the use for which they were intended.

There are, however, a number of ways in which these facilities could be provided at St Christopher's and these options are considered within the statement of need. The options include a free standing building in either the southernmost point of graveyard or on a separate parcel of land to the northwest of the church. These options have been discounted for a number of reasons, including cost and the remote location; as too has the option of providing the facilities within the existing body of the church, due to the compact nature of the building and its

sensitivity.

In light of these considerations we have accepted that of the options explored, linking a new build to the existing extension and extending along the boundary wall represents the option with the least harmful impact on the setting of the Grade I listed building and the character of the surrounding conservation area. It is recognised, however, that the projection of a new section of building forward of the tower and in some views, potentially obscuring the bottom sill of the window to the north aisle, would lead to a small level of harm occurring to the significance of the building. As such it will be necessary to weigh this harm against the public benefits of the scheme, including retaining the church in a viable use, as required in paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Our document 'New Work in Historic Places of Worship' states that new work which appears to be a natural development of the church is often most successful and we have previously confirmed that we believe the architectural language, materials, mass and scale of the proposed extension help to make it less visible. The current scheme has also addressed our previously stated concerns regarding the potentially unutilised space created at the base of the tower, as a doorway has now been included, giving a function to that area.

Within our pre-application advice, we have also detailed the importance of addressing the buried remains and archaeology on the site. Whilst the application sets out that the archaeology will be dealt with at pre-application stage, this point in time has passed and we reiterate again the importance of ensuring that the archaeological matters are appropriately considered at the earliest stage.

In conclusion we considered that the need for the additional facilities to compliment the church have been justified in line with our guidance and that the preferred option represents the least harmful approach to providing these facilities and as such, we do not object to the application”.

The Society For The Protection Of Ancient Buildings (SPAB).

The Society maintains its views (letter of 12 March 2015 to agent) in respect of the design; and while we do not wish to object to the current application, we hope that there may still be an opportunity to revise the proposals in accordance with our previous advice.

SPAB pre-app advice direct to agent March 15

The Society considered this case in 2013 and concluded that a development at the West End may be the only solution to meet the needs of the parish, and that it would be the least obtrusive location for an extension. Notwithstanding this view, the Society urged the parish to ensure that all alternative options have been thoroughly explored with the LPA before permission for an extension is sought.

With regard to design matters, we had previously advised in 2013 that the proposals had much to commend them. In our view, the scheme was modest in size, not over ambitious, and the extension nestled into the village landscape. However, we did also feel that the design of the extension ought to be revised to provide a more contemporary response and clearer articulation at the juncture of the new facility and the North-West corner of the church. We therefore encouraged the preparation of thumbnail sketches to aid future discussions with ourselves and other consultees. It is disappointing therefore that we did not receive any sketches or further correspondence in this regard.

Given the character and interest of the church, its immediate setting and the wider context, we maintain our view that any new addition to the building should be modest and low key in its form and design. The current scheme, while still successfully modest and low key, does not appear to

differ greatly from the former proposal, the principal changes being to the fenestration and the relocation of the entrance.

Consequently, we would encourage further exploration of the design options and as per our advice in 2013. In particular, we would welcome further consideration to be given to a more contemporary design response and we encourage you to reconsider the possibility of locating the main body of the extension further West to improve the articulation between the church and the extension and the internal circulation.

The proposed lobby area between the church and the meeting room is worryingly tight and constrained; indeed, it is highly likely to prove very awkward in use and result in a bottleneck when people are moving between the buildings and others are waiting to use the toilets or access the storage area. Therefore, if it is possible, relocating the extension further West could open up opportunities for changes to the internal plan that would be of practical benefit to those using the building and avoid potential problems such as those mentioned above. Additionally, relocating the main body of the extension further West may also allow for improvements to the North elevation. In our view, the proposed roof to the extension is not entirely successful, particularly at the point where it meets the North wall of the church at a high level and continues along to meet the buttress. It is felt therefore that some form of visual/physical 'break' between the existing and new fabric is needed. The 'break' may be expressed through the use of different materials or through a difference in roof heights for example.

Ancient Monuments Society - Raise no concerns of principle.

Any proposal to extend a listed church is likely to involve difficult decisions. The extension might appear rather squeezed within the intended location between the ancient fabric of the church, the 1998 single storey extension and the boundary wall, and yet the "unplanned" low-key appearance that results is of itself in character with an ancient church - precisely how past generations might have chosen to add accommodation. This contextualisation is sealed by the use of natural stone for the shell and for the roof. Provided that there is strict compliance with the stated promise to use local natural stone and to re-site all the monuments that will be displaced, we have no objections to offer.

PDNPA Conservation Officer – Objects to the proposed development and makes the following detailed comments:

The agent has submitted proposals for an extension to St. Christopher's Church, in the proposed location, on 3 previous occasions (in draft form and as a planning application see history above). The proposed extension has not altered from the draft proposals seen by Officers in February 2015. Officer comments that the siting, mass, scale and design of the proposed extension would significantly harm the Grade I listed designated heritage asset, its setting and Pott Shrigley Conservation Area still apply.

The siting, mass, scale and design of the proposed extension would significantly harm this nationally important Grade I listed building and its setting, and will have a negative impact on the significance of Pott Shrigley Conservation Area. There is no clear and convincing justification for this harm and no exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated and therefore the proposed scheme is considered contrary to local and national planning policy.

PDNPA Archaeology - In line with previous advice recommends that the results of archaeological evaluation are required before the application is determined (NPPF para 128/9), but that the applicant is only required to undertake such work if the development appears otherwise acceptable to the planning authority with particular reference to the setting of the Grade I Listed Building. In its present form the application clearly does not meet the information requirements of

NPPF para 128 and should not be granted consent (NPPF paras 128/9).

The applicant has been previously advised in 2012 that an application on this site will require the submission of the results of archaeological field evaluation to establish significance and impact as required by NPPF para 128. However, notes pre-application comments in 2013 suggesting that the principle of development on the site should be accepted by the planning authority before such evaluation is carried out, presumably to avoid archaeological damage to a site that subsequently does not gain consent.

Officer Note: Officers have written to the agent to confirm the archaeological evaluation work is essential to move forward, and would be the case with either a positive or negative recommendation from officers. Without the evaluation officers could neither make a proper decision based on all the facts and the applicant would be prejudiced in any potential appeal if vital evaluation information was not available to an Inspector.

PDNPA Tree Conservation Officer

Firstly the tree report is dated 2012 and is therefore out of date and at the very least would require updating. The British Standard was updated in that year and one of the major changes concerns ingress into the Root Protection Area, which in this case is considerable. I would suggest that further consideration and need for this potentially damaging process should be undertaken, with possible alternatives. Pruning the crown and the roots in the same season would be likely to cause the tree to be unreasonably stressed and could impact negatively on the trees future.

Representations

Two letters have been received to date.

One is from the Pott Shrigley School / Village Hall and makes a general comment that during weekdays school staff and parents park all along the road which is very busy. The school building has been damaged many times by high sided vehicles turning the corner of the road.

The other letter also raises the following concerns about traffic issues:

- 1) Great concern that, apart from the two spaces allocated to the disabled, there is no reference in this application to additional parking. The Church has no designated parking spaces, as the cobbled area outside the lych gate does not belong to the Church and during the week all the spaces are taken by residents and the staff of the Pott Shrigley School.
- 2) A potentially dangerous obstruction is frequently created by cars parked along Shrigley Road whenever there is a wedding, a funeral, a meeting of the mother and toddler group in the Church or twice a day when parents collect their children from school. Motorists are forced to drive from the junction with Spuley Lane to the far side of the church on what has effectively become a single track road with no pulling in areas and poor visibility caused by a blind bend. Photographic evidence supplied (see website record for details).
- 3) More groups would use the new room thus aggravating an already dangerous parking situation. The Poynton Relief Road is likely to lead to a 25% increase in traffic passing through the village, some of which will use this section of the road. Consideration must be given to ways of alleviating what is already a dangerous situation not compounding it by increasing the number of vehicles needing to park.

Planning Policies and Legislation

Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires the Authority to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that where an application is made to the local planning authority for planning permission, the Authority shall have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application and any other material considerations.

Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states the local planning authority 'shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses' in the exercise of the Council's planning functions and in considering whether or not to grant planning permission for development that affects a listed building or its setting. Caselaw shows that the decision maker needs to demonstrate that they have placed considerable importance and weight to this requirement.

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also contains a General duty as respects conservation areas in exercise of planning functions. It states that in the exercise, with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, of any functions under or by virtue of any of the provisions of the Planning Acts, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Policy Framework

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1-3, DS1, L3, HC4.

Relevant Local Plan policies: LC4, LC5, LC6, LC15, LC16, LC20, LT11 and LT18

The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is a material consideration in the determination of any planning application. Paragraph 115 within the framework says that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Park which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage should be given great weight in the National Park.

Paragraphs 128 – 134 in the Framework are relevant for considering development which affects heritage assets. Appropriate evidence to describe the significance of any affected heritage asset should be required to inform decision making and local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any affected heritage asset taking into account available evidence and necessary expertise. This assessment should be taken into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

Great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets within the National Park. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

The Authority's conservation policies reflect the approach taken in the Framework. L3, LC5 and LC6, together says that development must conserve and where appropriate enhance or reveal the significance of heritage assets and their setting and that other than in exceptional circumstances, development will not be permitted where it is likely to cause harm to the significance of any cultural heritage asset.

Policy L3 of the Authority's adopted Core Strategy states that development involving cultural heritage assets must conserve, and where appropriate enhance or reveal the significance of the asset: other than in exceptional circumstances, development will not be permitted where it is likely to cause harm to the significance of any cultural heritage asset. NPPF paragraph 132 states that substantial harm to a Grade I listed building should be wholly exceptional.

GSP3 and LC4 together say that all development must respect, conserve and enhance all valued characteristics of the site and buildings subject to the development proposal. Particular attention will be paid to impact on the character and setting of buildings, scale of development, design in accordance with the design guide and the impact upon living conditions of communities. L1 says that all development must conserve the landscape character of the National Park. LT11 and LT18 require development to be served by a safe access and have adequate parking and turning space.

Policy HC4 relating to the provision and retention of community services and facilities provides encouragement for the principle of improving existing community facilities within settlements.

It is considered that policies in the Development Plan provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park's statutory purposes for the determination of this application. It is considered that in this case there is no significant conflict between prevailing policies in the Development Plan and more recent policy in the Framework with regard to the issues that are raised because both documents seek to promote sustainable development which conserve and enhance the National Park and its designated heritage assets. Therefore the relevant development plan policies should be afforded full weight in any planning decision on this application.

In considering whether to grant planning permission for the proposals the Authority is obliged to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The Pott Shrigley Conservation Area Appraisal is also a relevant material consideration as is the Authority's design guide (2007) and Alterations and Extensions Detailed Design Guide (2014).

Assessment

The key issue is considered to be whether the proposed development would conserve the significance of the Church (including below ground archaeological significance) and its setting, the setting of nearby listed buildings and the Pott Shrigley Conservation Area. The secondary but nonetheless important issue is the impact of the proposed use of the extension upon local parking pressures and thus highway safety.

The Church is a Grade I listed building and therefore for policy purposes is a designated heritage asset of exceptional significance (being in the top 4% of listed buildings) and of national importance. The church cottages to the south and the Primary school / village Hall to the east are Grade II listed buildings. The Church is located in the centre of the village, within the designated Pott Shrigley Conservation Area, and is a well-used focal point for the village and wider community. Local and national planning policies are clear that while extensions and alterations to designated heritage assets such as listed buildings are acceptable in principle, the development must conserve or enhance the significance of the affected heritage assets.

Significance in terms of heritage policy is defined in the NPPF as the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. There is a very strong presumption against development which would have a harmful impact upon significance unless that harm can be demonstrated to be outweighed by the public benefits of the development.

The Church has been established on the site for centuries and, by all accounts, is as busy and well used as ever e.g. it holds two Sunday morning services. There is no evidence therefore to suggest that the church is not viable or that the proposed development is necessary to secure the optimal viable use of the heritage asset. The church is also in good condition and clearly well maintained. Officers clearly understand that the existing single WC and brew facilities are less than ideal for the current level of use, however they also recognise they were approved in 1999 as an acceptable compromise which balanced the harm against the need. They are housed within the existing extension which was then, as now, considered by officers to be the maximum size that could possibly be added on this elevation of the church without causing significant harm. Consequently, any need for larger facilities was clearly flagged up by officers both at that time and on many occasions since, as needing to be housed separately elsewhere on the site. Whilst the church has clearly operated and indeed thrived with the current facilities over the last 16 years, nevertheless it is clear that improved facilities would bring some public benefit for the congregation and other users and would further sustain the church's use. Officers therefore consider it would be a public benefit upon which some weight could be placed.

The submitted application is supported by a Heritage statement which identifies in some detail that the significance of Saint Christopher's Church and its boundary wall is derived from having Evidential Value, Historical Value, Architectural Value, Aesthetic Value and Communal Value. Your officers generally agree with the assessment of but take issue with some aspects of the heritage assessment as set out later in this report.

The applicant's Heritage Assessment concludes that:

'Although the proposed building is in a generally traditional rather than contemporary style, it is in a high-quality design with a glass entrance screen adjacent to the historic building and has been carefully sited to minimize its impact on both the setting of the listed building and the Conservation Area and will not change the character substantially. Other siting options have been carefully considered and rejected for reasons outlined. Although the proposed building will have an impact on the historic building, its setting and the Conservation Area, the proposals are considered to constitute less than substantial harm in planning terms.

This harm should be off-set against the public benefits of the proposals. The new building will result in the provision of additional space and facilities for Saint Christopher's Church and, by enabling the congregation to grow, a further source of income to enable repair and maintenance which will enable the continued use of the historic building and which is considered to be a significant public benefit.'

Officers have some significant concerns about some of the evidential and interpretation aspects of the applicants' heritage assessment which are set out below in more detail. Although Officers generally agree with the applicants on the main point that the main significance of the Church is derived from its historical and architectural evidence as a rare surviving and relatively untouched example of a C15th church, officers have consistently advised against this proposal and, in direct contrast with the agent's conclusions, consider the harm would be significant and would lie toward the higher end of the 'less than substantial harm' scale.

It is important to note that the proposed extension has not altered from the draft proposals seen by officers in February 2015. Officer pre-application advice given then that the siting, mass, scale and design of the proposed extension would significantly harm the Grade I listed designated heritage asset, its setting and Pott Shrigley Conservation Area still apply.

Two of the most important elements of the church's historic significance are its external symmetry and the fact that its exterior remains virtually unaltered since its phased construction in the 14th to late-15th/early-16th centuries. All elevations display features typical of the Perpendicular phase of Gothic Architecture (dating from the mid-14th to the early-16th century), characterised by strong vertical lines, with the rigid lines of window mullions often continuing upwards to the top of the arch itself, and with flatter, four-centred arches. These elements create a balanced, unified whole, and make a highly significant contribution to the historic character and appearance of the church.

The proposed extension would disrupt the balance and destroy the symmetry of the building, having a permanent negative impact on its historic character and appearance and causing a high level of harm to its significance. It would also dominate the north and west elevations of the church, permanently covering part of the diagonal buttress to the north aisle, obscuring part of the west elevation of the north aisle and its large window as well as blocking views of the lower part of the tower from the north and north-west.

The submitted Heritage Statement justifies the harm which the extension would cause to these elevations by assessing them as “of lesser significance”: the west elevation as views of it are constrained by the yew trees”, and the north being described as “of least importance as it contains less designed detail and views are further constrained by its proximity to the boundary wall and the road”.

These assessments are considered erroneous, firstly, if parts of a listed building are partially obscured from view, whether by vegetation or a low wall, this does not reduce their historic significance. Secondly, the north aisle had been constructed by at least the end of the 14th century and represents some of the oldest, and therefore most historically significant fabric on the building, with tall, vertically-proportioned Perpendicular Gothic lights with trefoil tracery and with four-centred arches above the east and west windows. The tower on the west elevation is also one of the most prominent and significant features of the church, as the Heritage Statement itself recognises: “The tower is unusually massive for the size of the building”. Contrary to the assessment in the application, therefore, the north and west elevations are of considerable significance and the proposals will result in a high level of harm to the Grade I listed church and its setting.

The application's assessment of the significance of the north boundary wall and gateway is also questionable. The Heritage Statement asserts that the existing boundary wall at the north-west corner of the church post-dates 1910. However, the First Edition Ordnance Survey (1871) map clearly shows the gateway and the existing paths through the churchyard still in situ. The third edition Ordnance Survey map (1909) is considerably less detailed than the First Edition, and shows no gateways or paths. The gateway may therefore be of more historic interest than has been presumed in the application. An assessment of significance of the gateway and of the associated stone steps is required before a decision can be made concerning its removal.

The long roof of the proposed extension will be clearly visible beside the churchyard boundary wall when viewed from Shrigley Road, and the blocking from view of significant parts of the church will have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the Pott Shrigley Conservation Area.

Regarding design and detailing of the proposed extension; any extension in this location should be on the smallest footprint possible, should avoid wrapping around the diagonal buttress and obscuring the west window of the north aisle and should avoid projecting beyond the diagonal buttress to the tower. Officers have previously and consistently advised that the existing WC extension is the largest possible in this location without harming the building and strongly encouraged the applicants to look at alternative locations elsewhere in the churchyard.

The applicants could have considered a more contemporary design, utilising a palette of traditional materials, as advised by SPAB in 2012 and 2015. In the submitted proposal however, having followed a traditional approach to the design, the black painted timber gablet louvre vent abutting the external wall of the north aisle, the soil vent pipe through the roof and vents in the roof slope would be unsightly, non-traditional and inappropriate in such close proximity to the Grade I listed structure. Full scaled drawings of windows and doors would also be required; none have been provided although these could have been conditioned had the development been acceptable.

Whilst it is clear that the proposed extension will harm the significance of the Grade I designated heritage asset, its setting and the Conservation Area, the comprehensive options appraisal, previously requested by Officers demonstrating that all possible alternative solutions have been fully explored and clearly setting out any exceptional circumstances, has not been provided. The submitted heritage assessment does cover alternative options but in little detail and officers remain unconvinced that options for improvement to or extension of the existing Village Hall, in order to meet current needs and to address the problems of level access, have been fully investigated. Alternatively, whilst a separate building within the grounds would not be ideal, given the clear harm to a nationally significant Grade I listed building, such alternative options merit greater consideration and liaison with officers before they can/should be ruled out. The submitted statement does not thoroughly investigate these and in ruling some out due to adverse impacts upon trees or other matters fails to weigh those constraints against the far greater impact and harm to the Grade I Listed building.

Archaeological considerations

The proposed extension would clearly impact upon the below ground archaeology of the site which is part of the significance of the Church and its setting. The need for such an evaluation was flagged up in pre-application advice, as well as post submission, however, to date none has been submitted. The reason for this was stated that the agents wished to establish that the principle of the development would be accepted first by the Authority, before committing to further expense. The officer's advice has been consistent over several years and in any case irrespective of the officer view a suitable archaeological evaluation is an essential part of the information requirements to properly consider the impacts of the proposal. In the absence of a suitable evaluation of the below ground impacts of the proposed development upon the existing graves and any other potential features there is insufficient information available to officers, and indeed statutory consultees to make a fully informed judgement on the impacts and thereby carry out the balancing exercised required by the NPPF in first assessing the degree of harm and whether this could be outweighed by the public benefits.

Access and Highway considerations

The application plans indicate two disabled parking spaces within the end of the woodland TPO, just outside the western pedestrian gate into the churchyard. This is presently a rough informal parking/turning area which actually lies outside the application site area (but owned by the church) and already appears to be in informal use. The proposed parking area currently lies under the canopy and root protection area of trees within the designated TPO. No details of the proposed work are submitted other than a note of it being an opportunity to create a level area for accessible parking and access into the church which raises concerns about potential impacts

upon the trees which have not been fully assessed within the application. As an existing parking area, the formal designation of the spaces by the church for accessible use is acceptable in principle; however being outside the application site area they currently do not form part of the current application.

There is clear evidence of parking congestion around the vicinity of the church during school pick up times and when services/functions take place within the church and/or village school/hall. As a break-out room for church functions the extension should not add to any parking situation as the users would already be attending the function. This fact is recognised by the Highway Authority who has raised no objections. Officers understand and have some sympathy with the local concerns about parking and congestion. However, the agent has confirmed that the use of the extension will be entirely in connection with the use of the church as a place of worship. Therefore although there are clearly no highway grounds to refuse the application, officers consider that a condition restricting use of the meeting room to purposes ancillary to the use of the church would be appropriate in the circumstances. This would avoid adding to the amenity and highway problems caused from parked vehicles which may occur by allowing independent use of the meeting room without suitable off-street parking.

Other considerations

Given the scale and location of the proposed extension in relation to nearby residential across Shrigley Road there are no concerns that the proposed development would result in any overlooking or loss of sunlight or daylight which would harm the amenity or privacy of any neighbouring property.

The impact of the extension upon the existing yew tree in the churchyard, and the formalisation of the parking area within the area of the TPO (although not within the red line site area) are not fully considered by an up to date arboricultural assessment. The submitted arboricultural report is missing key appendices and being from 2012 pre-dates updated British Standards for tree work which in particular has strengthened advice regarding avoidance of root protection areas. The 2012 report and proposed plans clearly show development within the root protection area of trees and acknowledges some damage will be caused which needs to be assessed in the light of current guidance. Had the development been acceptable in principle officers would have pursued an updated report taking account of current guidance for tree work and taken further advice from the Authority's Tree Conservation Officer. In the absence of such a report the impact upon the trees cannot properly be determined.

Conclusion

It is considered that taken as a whole, the siting, scale, massing and detailed design of the proposed extension would result in very clear and significant harm to this nationally important Grade I listed building and its setting, and will have a negative impact on the significance of Pott Shrigley Conservation Area. The level of harm would lie in your officers view, toward the upper end of the scale comprised within the NPPF's term of "less than substantial harm" (substantial harm being demolition or substantial loss of significance). Furthermore the application fails to provide sufficient evidence of the impact of the development upon the below ground archaeology resulting in an incomplete understanding of the full impacts of the proposed development. Finally the impacts of the development upon trees cannot properly be determined in the absence of an up to date arboricultural assessment.

No exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the harm so far identified. In the absence of exceptional circumstances alongside a lack of a sufficiently detailed consideration of alternative ways of meeting the need, the level of public benefit arising from the proposal fails to provide any clear and convincing justification to outweigh the significant harm so far identified. It is therefore concluded that approval of the proposal fails to conserve and enhance the special

interest and setting of the Church contrary to Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the Conservation Area (Section 72) and would be wholly contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, 2 and 3 and L3, Local Plan policies LC4, LC5, LC6 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

The proposed development would not result in any harm to the amenity of neighbouring properties or highway safety however these issues do not provide any overriding weight either for or against the proposals.

In the absence of any further material considerations to indicate otherwise, the application is recommended for refusal.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil