



RESPONSE TO COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Proposed New Church Building for 'The Gate' Reading, 384 The Meadway, RG30 4NX

9 September 2019

1.0 Introduction

Further to our email dated 11/7/19, in which we responded to comments uploaded from members of the public, we have reviewed subsequent comments and provide an updated response below, in the context of the recently revised designs/drawings, dated September 2019.

Many of the public comments relate to similar topics. Therefore, rather than respond to each comment individually, we have listed below the topics by subject matter.

We note that there are also numerous letters of support and some members of the public have been very complementary of the proposed improved appearance of the site and building and welcome the improved facilities that the new building will offer. However, in this response we just refer to comments raising concerns.

Whilst writing, the Transport Statement and revised car parking strategy with update site plan/car parking layout are in the process of being finalised to address comments received. These documents are also being updated in line with recent discussions with Reading Borough Council's Transport department. Therefore, the below response to transport matters has been kept concise as for detail, reference should be made to the updated Transport Statement and site plan which will be made publically available soon.

2.0 Use of the proposed buildings

Some concerns have been raised regarding future use of the building. It appears these concerns generally arise from a perception that the use of the new building will change compared to existing. Several neighbours have referred to use of the phrase 'community centre' in the planning application, inferring that this will be a change of use compared to existing.

To confirm, there will be no change in use of the buildings.

Reference made in the application to a new church and community centre was intended to convey that the church building usage, as existing and as proposed, is as a community building, because it has been (and will remain for the new building) in use for activities besides Sunday church services, for the benefit of the local community.

However, all existing uses will continue and no new uses are proposed.

The cafe will be ancillary to the church use, as a refreshment area for church users, not as a public eating/drinking establishment in its own right. As such it will be used in conjunction with existing church run activities.



3.0 Attendance and frequency of use

The number of people using the building on Sundays and during the week is not expected to change, albeit this cannot reasonably be predicted. The church's aim is to help meet the needs of those in the community, not just those in the church congregation. The church's schedule of proposed activities will remain as existing.

(Please refer to the updated Design and Access Statement rev E, dated September 2019, for detail of uses, number of attendees and frequency of events)

The purpose of the larger building is to provide a better variety of 'fit for purpose rooms' to suit the needs of the activities that already take place. For example the existing offices are dark and cramped so the new offices will be more spacious and have more natural light. The new spaces will also be more energy efficient, flexible, better lit, better ventilated and more accessible for people of varying levels of mobility.

It is of course accepted that attendance may grow (as it may also decrease in size), but this is the case with any place of worship, and is the case as existing. The existing building has the capacity to seat more people than currently use the building. This fact therefore remains unchanged from the existing situation.

The increase in size of the worship space is modest. The existing church building worship space floor area excluding the stage is 215m² compared to the proposed 250m². Most of the additional floor area for the new building is for ancillary and break-out accommodation, such as additional meeting rooms, office space and the café.

However, despite the fact that the number of users of the building may never increase, due to concerns raised by local people regarding the potential for a larger building to result in an increase in the number of car trips and on street parking demand, the parking strategy has been revised compared to the original planning application. The revised parking strategy takes into account the potential for growth of the number of people using the building, such that should occupancies increase, there will be no detrimental impact with regard to on street car parking. In fact, the proposals should relieve on street parking stress.

4.0 Car parking impact on surrounding streets

The church has employed a transport specialist (The Glanville Group) to assess the existing parking situation and the parking impact of the new development. For detail, reference should be made to the revised Transport Statement dated September 2019.

The existing church car park is very poorly laid out and very few of the parking spaces comply with modern design standards. As a result, although the car park theoretically contains between 34-36 spaces, in practice, only up to 29 spaces can be used concurrently. When this number of cars are parked on site, access and manoeuvring can be problematic. This dissuades some church users from parking on site, resulting in some on street parking.

To improve on site parking and reduce off site (on street) parking the proposed site layout provides an increase in the total number of car parking spaces (41 spaces proposed) and **all spaces and manoeuvring zones comply with modern space standards.**



Furthermore, the church has agreed to implement a Car Park Management Plan, for approval by Reading Borough Council's Transport Department, to ensure that church car parking is properly managed by (say) parking stewards on days when the car park is busiest, i.e. for Sunday morning church services.

In addition, the church has committed to implement a 'Travel Plan', details of which will be to the approval of Reading Borough Council and secured by planning condition. This will be used to further manage church car parking and encourage the use of other sustainable means of transport. Proposed measures include: promotion of walking, cycling, church mini-bus use and public transport options to church users via a notice board and the church website, promotion of the Travel Plan and targets, promotion of the health, environmental and financial benefits of walking and cycling, provision of journey planning website links, encouraging car sharing amongst church attendees and consideration towards setting up social walking and cycling groups in order to encourage people to walk more and for further distances. (For detail, refer to the submitted Travel Plan)

Disruption from Construction Vehicles

It is usual for the local planning authority to stipulate a Planning Condition for submission and approval of a pre-commencement Construction Method Statement / Construction Management Plan to include measures for site traffic to ensure that the amenity of neighbours is respected during construction works and that Highway safety is maintained. The building contractor would be required to produce a method statement, to include for construction vehicle access for deliveries etc. The church and contractor would also consult with neighbours, as necessary, during the construction process.

5.0 Loss of Privacy/overlooking

The glazing design has been reviewed in response to concerns raised. The latest drawings, dated September 2019, contain design changes and clarifications. Below is a list of considerations and design changes implemented.

- The houses to the east and west (i.e. 5A and 44 Keswick Close) are closest to the proposed building. All first and second floor windows* will therefore be obscured glass so that there is no overlooking. *with the exception of the worship space double height windows as the upper sections of these windows, whilst at first floor level, do not serve first floor accommodation.
- The second floor rooms are set back from the main facade, giving greater separation distance from neighbouring properties. In addition the roof partially obscures views from the second floor rooms. Detail is indicated on the proposed updated section drawings.
- The second floor facades are to be constructed from curtain walling however much of the curtain walling panels are glass 'spandrel panels' (glass panels with a solid backing, i.e. no views out) and much of the glazing is to be obscured. The drawings have been updated to clarify what is clear glass, obscured glass or spandrel panel.
- Properties to the south are at some distance from the building, the closest property being 388 The Meadway. The rear facade of 388 The Meadway, at its closest point, is 37 metres from the south facade of the new building.
- Properties to the south, north and west are partially screened by mature existing trees which are to be retained and protected during construction works in line with the submitted arboricultural method statement.



- There are no direct views to the properties to the north from the first floor of the building.
- The second floor of the building is set back some distance from the properties to the north. The closest property is 9 Keswick Close which at its closest point is 35 metres from the proposed second floor north facade.
- The landscape proposals include for new boundary planting to provide additional visual screening
- All ground floor glazing to the cafe has been omitted.
- The ground floor fire escape doors to north wall of the worship space have been changed to obscured glass, to prevent views northwards from the worship space.

6.0 Scale and Footprint

The proposed building is a similar footprint to the existing building with only a slight increase proposed, 530 m2 compared to 506m2. The additional footprint is comprised of the church cafe. The cafe has been designed as a single storey structure as it is located close to the eastern site boundary. The height of the cafe has been reduced significantly in the revised designs, updated in September 2019.

In the latest design changes, the cafe footprint has also been reduced in size, moved further from the eastern boundary with 5A Keswick Close, and all east facing ground floor glazing to the cafe omitted.

The existing church building is small in height compared to many of the surrounding residential properties. It is therefore considered that the site can reasonably accommodate a taller building. Houses along the Meadway are two storeys with pitched roofs. The proposed building is also generally two storeys high but with a smaller set back 'pavilion' at second floor level, which conceptually relates to the roof zone of adjacent two storey properties.

Due to the smaller scale of some houses on Keswick Close, some of which also are set at a reduced site level, the proposed second floor pavilion has been set back and positioned as far as possible from the Keswick Close dwellings to the north, so that the new church building as viewed from these properties will 'read' as a two storey building. Furthermore, the proposed roof height has been reduced to the north, with a low pitch, with standing seam copper cladding taken down to plinth level to reduce the visual impact of the building within the landscaped grounds.

7.0 Appearance

There is a range of building styles in the area. The residential properties along the Meadway are mostly red brick. The residential properties in Keswick close are a mix of red brick and white render.

The existing building already differs in style, material and colour to the surrounding residential properties and this is usual for public buildings in a residential setting. The existing building is faced in buff brick and buff stone cladding. The use of high quality natural buff coloured stone for the proposed building is similar in tone/colour to the existing church building, but superior in terms of quality and longevity.



The proposed materials, including the copper roof, continue to distinguish the building from the residential buildings as a public building and a place of worship. Church buildings are traditionally of stone construction with copper roofs; therefore the material choice is considered appropriate.

8.0 Flooding/Drainage

The site has historically had issues with flooding, due to an inadequate drainage system which is the responsibility of Thames Water. As some neighbours have commented, this was rectified by Thames Water (a storage tank was submerged below the church car park) and since these works were carried out it is understood that there have been no further issues. The church cooperated fully with Thames Water for the benefit of the surrounding properties.

The existing Thames Water drainage system access covers and access arrangements will be retained as existing. Furthermore, the incorporation of permeable paving and soft landscape for the new hard landscaping, compared to non permeable tarmac as existing, will reduce surface water run-off from the site to create a more sustainable drainage solution, reducing load on the public sewer, to the benefit of the local drainage network.

A detailed drainage design will be carried out by civil engineers following any planning approval in line with the submitted drainage strategy report by CTP civil engineers, the principles of which are to ensure that the development will improve upon the existing scenario through the introduction of sustainable drainage means (SUDs).

9.0 Landscape and Maintenance

All existing trees are to be retained. The willow on the northern boundary, previously proposed to be removed, is now proposed to be retained. A specialist landscape designer has been employed by the church to prepare a high quality landscape scheme, which will create much improved site landscape from a visual and biodiversity perspective. The landscape scheme will also be subject to a maintenance plan, to be implemented by the church on occupation of the new building.

10. Noise from the building, the cafe and outdoor areas

A noise impact assessment has been submitted. The assessment concludes that predicted noise levels at adjacent residential properties will generally be within acceptable limits but that noise breakout from the Sanctuary and Café must be managed to ensure that, whenever internal noise levels exceed 75 dB(A), all windows or doors must be kept closed.

To address this point, the design of the external fabric will include walls, roof, windows and external doors designed to meet the required acoustic criteria. In addition, the sanctuary and cafe will be ventilated using a mechanical or passive ventilation system so they are not required to be ventilated by opening windows. Ductwork, external vents and roof vent terminals will be acoustically attenuated to meet the required criteria set out in the Noise Impact Assessment.

The site is currently used as a church and people already congregate externally with children play outside.

As set out in sections 2.0 'Use of the proposed buildings' and 3.0 'Attendance and frequency of use', the nature and frequency of use of the site will remain as existing. Therefore noise from use of the outdoor areas should not increase compared to existing.



Furthermore, in response to concerns raised by some neighbours adjacent to the church site, with regard to historical disturbance from those using the church gardens, the new landscape proposals aim to reduce disturbance to neighbours. Whereas the existing garden is 'un-zoned' and some of the boundary fences can be climbed by children (or have balls kicked against them), the new gardens will be zoned, to enable the church to better contain certain children's play activities, and new boundary planting will prevent access to boundary fences.

Although it is not anticipated that noise levels will increase, as an additional measure, the revised proposals include an acoustic timber screen to the full length of the terrace. These proprietary and tested products offer significant reduction in airborne sound transfer.

The church will engage with neighbours once the new building is occupied and the church will set in place appropriate noise management procedures, in line with the Noise Impact Assessment, to ensure that unacceptable level of noise disturbance are not experienced by the residential neighbours.

11. Land Covenants / Restrictions

Checks will be made by the church's solicitors but this is not a material planning consideration.

12. Ecology

Bat emergence surveys were carried out in July 2019 to check that the existing church building did not house any bat roosts. The emergence survey report has been uploaded to the online planning register.

The Law sets out requirements with respect to protection of wildlife and this will apply to the construction phase of this building project, if planning consent is granted.

The site was inspected by a senior ecologist for evidence of and assessed for potential to support protected and notable species. This included species listed under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA), and those given extra protection under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992.