

Building Condition Report

The report was compiled following initial meetings with Mr. David Powell and Mr. David Brill officers of High Street Baptist Chapel to identify repairs to the building and prevent further decay and explore a remodelling and refurbishment of the hall to maximise the chapels' role in the faith community relevant to its position adjacent to the new Bus Station.

We have during the spring and early summer of 2020 and subsequently carried out a building condition survey as recorded in this report and a measured survey as recorded on the initial drawings listed below:

- Drwg. No 01 Site Location.
- Drwg. No. 02 Ground Floor Plan Survey.
- Drwg. No. 03 North Elevation, South Elevations Survey.
- Drwg. No. 04 Section AA Survey & Proposed, West Elevation Survey & Proposed.
- Drwg. No. 05 Ground Floor Plan Proposed. First Floor Plan Proposed.
- Drwg. No. 05A Ground Floor Plan Sketch 2 - Proposed. First Floor Plan Sketch 2 – Proposed.
- (not used)
- Drwg. No. 06 North Elevation South Elevations Proposed.

Drawing list now superseded.

Progress has been hampered by the Covid 19 restrictions compounded by the limited access available to the rear of the building caused by the site being enclosed within the fenced perimeter of the new Bus Station. The contractors Morgan Siddal have provided survey spot levels and heights of the end gable.

Further investigative works are required once the perimeter works are completed, and external render can be removed.

The investigative survey works have been undertaken: The floor adjacent to west elevation has been exposed and the ceiling to wall junction in the north wall exposed by cutting out the ceiling and high-level wall.

The report identifies the remedial building work required which will be quantified and priced to establish a cost plan for the purposes of grant applications and subsequent letting as phased building contracts.

General Notes.

The chapel is Grade II listed and the hall is thus deemed to be listed by association. The lower single storey building between the Chapel and Hall containing the side entrance, corridor and minister's office is probably original to the chapel and hence listed.

The hall was built in 1929 in the Art Décor style as a single storey church hall annexed from the original chapel separated by a strip of no man's land later infilled by the kitchen building.

The hall is possibly constructed as a steel frame column carrying a curved steel roof truss frame supporting a timber purlin and rafter roof finished with Welsh slates set over rendered cavity brickwork walls. Visual roof access made from is readily available to inspect the beam.

The Art Décor theme is detailed externally with an ornate timber dentil fascia and decorative render to the main north elevation. Internally the column masonry surrounds form pilasters establishing five wall bays carrying a curved plaster beamed ceiling with subdued decorative plaster relief at the top of the wall columns. The curved ceiling is currently hidden by a horizontal suspended ceiling.

Toilet Block. The toilet block is a later addition built up off the boundary walls of the adjacent 1960's shopping development seemingly extending the existing toilets. The walls are badly cracked at construction junctions seemingly because of inadequate bonding of mixed wall constructions and or inadequate foundations.

A fuller description of the building elements will evolve in the analysis.

Foundations.

No information available, no evidence of subsidence or foundation problems to the main hall, although slight evidence of foundation related movement is noted to the external walls of the kitchen block infill adjacent to the main entrance door and the boiler house. The wall is adjacent to the recently discovered and re-capped well. Possible presence of spring water.

Wall North.

The external wall is finished in a masonry paint finish on a harling / pebble caste render which is rendered full to the ornamental window reveal return. (May be an applied topcoat and not the original render finish.) There is only slight evidence of damp penetration on the internal wall. Sheltered north facing wall are usually a decade of deterioration behind a storm facing southwest wall. Consequently, the damp entry and cavity wall tie failure evident in the south wall should be assumed to be present in the north wall and will need to be included in any programme of remedial works. The north wall does not appear to be of cavity wall construction.

Windows in the north wall are the original timber casement windows with metal opening lights many of which have been removed and replaced with fixed lights reducing both their heritage appearance and function as ventilated openings. Given their 91-year age the windows would best be included for replacement. Further inspection required following removal of security screens.

Windows in the south wall are modern replacements, and badly decayed.

Eaves, fascia and soffit are stained timber in an ornate and decorative dentil and scotia moulding relief. High level examination required. Facsimile repair may be required.

Entrance Doors. The panelled hardwood doors are not original and are packed out vertically and horizontally to fill the opening. It is envisaged that a conservation based funded scheme would wish to see these replaced, with purpose made joinery to fit the opening. This would afford the opportunity to improve security.

Entrance Door Canopy. The cover slab of the door canopy is set on curved and carved stone / concrete corbels (may be precast concrete caste in two halves and joined in situ) supporting the cantilever of the slab. The slab is edged in concrete / mortar dentil blocks bonded to the slab edge.

The concrete slab edge is badly spalled and many of the dentils are missing. The canopy can be sand blasted / pressure washed and repaired in resin bonded concrete under a new lead or zinc roof covering. The dentil blocks can be caste and resin bonded on bronze dowels. Subject to detail specification. The feature is repairable.

Fire Escape Doors. Modern steel faced security door. The doors are adequate for purpose as fire exit doors but may require replacement to restore the heritage context and or to provide an alternative entrance and not merely to act as exit doors.

South Wall.

The wall is finished in smooth fined down sand and cement render which does not appear to be original. The wall render is cracked in a square pattern indicative of underlying cavity wall tie failure. Internally there is real evidence of damp penetration sufficient to have caused cavity wall tie failure. Replacement cavity wall tie repairs should be examined concurrent with any works programme.

Bore scope investigation is proposed.

Conversely the render may be overly strong cement render on a weaker black mortar background and thus suffering from contraction grazing – Incorrect mortar specification.

Wall Mortar.

The original brickwork may be laid in black mortar composed of local coal dust, lime, and various horse by products. Historically used in the locality black mortar may have still been in use as late as 1929. Black mortar loses its cementitious qualities with age and fails to stop the passage of moisture through the wall. Further investigation required. If the brick walls are laid in black mortar and cavity wall tie failure is present to the degree suspected, then a comparative cost study for replacement of the wall outer skin will need to be undertaken.

The black mortar in the north wall is relatively hard.

Windows. The windows in the south wall are replacement and are not good copies of the original window design. Screens to be removed for full condition inspection. Replacement required.

Eaves, fascia and soffit are stained timber in a plain board detail. In need of replacement.

Steel Frame. If the building is supported on a steel frame and given the level of damp entry appearing the south wall as shown inside the hall, it is probable that the steel columns (if they exist) are corroded. Further investigation by a bore hole scoping is recommended to prove the steel frame, the wall construction and mortar type. The wall is possibly an early cavity wall built around a steel frame but may be solid brick and pier wall.

West Wall.

Still attached to the west gable wall are the party walls of houses previously demolished by the local authority in the 1960's. Policy was then to leave the last wall of a demolished property standing as weather protection against the gable wall of the property to remain. The wall was usually 'gable ended' with a skin of rendered dense concrete masonry blockwork. In this instance it appears that some walls have been left as supporting rendered masonry piers without a blockwork skin – to be confirmed. The old masonry walls appear to be in black mortar.

Render. The render is badly cracked and grazed and appears to be the source of water entry into the west gable hall wall and floor. The original hall gable hall wall may be of thinner construction to accommodate the built-in storage cupboards. The suspended timber hall floor adjoining is wet rotted along the wall to floor boundary. Note the latent dangers of dry / wet rot problems associated with a damp sleeper floor construction.

Merthyr Townscape Mural. The wall is decorated externally with the historical Merthyr Townscape Mural; the paintwork is faded and in need of restoration. However, restoration cannot be considered on such a porous, cracked and structurally unsafe wall.

The west masonry gable wall backing the mural needs to be demolished. The gable wall of the hall deemed to be of cavity construction and contiguous with the envelope of the hall is to remain - to be confirmed. The hall gable wall when exposed may require a protective blockwork / brickwork cavity skin.

The applicant has identified an artist and obtained a cost to record and repaint the mural. The mural is currently painted on the flat and the return surfaces of the wall which is of longer length than the proposed flat surface of the replacement. The replacement mural can be slightly scaled down to be reproduced on the reduced surface area that will be available after demolition of the old masonry walls.

East Wall.

Original render with some evidence of previous water entry and repair internally above ceiling void. Detailed inspection from roof ladders required.

Roof over original Chapel Annex.

The roof has recently been re-roofed in a grey concrete tile and ridge tile, with new white UPVC capping fascia's and brown UPVC rainwater goods. While the hall is listed by association to the main chapel, the chapel annex is probably original to the chapel and thus included in the main listing.

The tile is not deemed in keeping with the listed building status.

Hall South Roof.

The south roof is finished in Penrhyn blue / purple sates and except for works to make good to junctions with previous local authority demolition works and or storm damage appear to be original. The slates should be in suitable condition for re-use, however the roofing battens and especially the galvanised slate nails will have decayed and will be the future cause of roof slate slippage.

With the proposed demolition of the gable ends to the old houses the roof edge will need to be reset which coupled with potential slate nail failure re-sating of this roof is envisaged reusing the existing slate.

Hall North Roof.

The north roof has a covering of moss and appears to be a recent re-slating using blue/ black asbestos slates. The weaving shed terra cotta ridge tiles are taken to be of the same period, possibly relating to the making good to junctions with 1960's demolition works by the local authority.

The slates although gathering moss appear sound and waterproof. The roofing battens and nails would also be sound enough to give the roof an extended life span. However, with the proposed demolition of the masonry gable ends of the old houses the roof edge will need to be re-slatted. If the 'asbestos' slates are from the 1960's they will be asbestos based and if removed even in part could not be re-used and would need to be removed from site.

The asbestos slate finish is not deemed a suitable heritage solution and we would propose a new Penrhyn slated roof to match the rear. The weaving shed ridge tiles could be re-used and any broken ridge tiles matched as the product is still available.

Hall Floor.

The floor appears to be a timber suspended floor built in tongue and groove timber boards on timber joists supported on brick sleeper walls and ventilated by external air vents. It is rotted along the junction with the west wall and this area will need replacement.

A small area of the floor is 'springing' which can be indicative of timber rot attack.

A preliminary opening up inspection is advised before any building contracts are let. The conditions of wet stagnant air are the prime requisites of wet and dry rot.

Pre-Inspection Contract.

Further investigative works will be needed to the areas which remain unseen and uninspected at present.

- Suspended hall floor.
- Curved ceiling void and steel frame.
- External wall construction, cavity ties and steel frame.
- Roof void above the Office and Kitchen.

Internal Decoration.

The south and west walls exhibit dampness. The plasterwork would dry out sufficiently to enable painting if the external source of dampness is cured. The refurbishment works would include a complete redecoration of the hall.

Remodelling Works – based on discussions with Chapel Officers.

Toilets.

The chapel is a major venue in the borough for choral concerts, but this function is hampered by limited toilet facilities.

A suggested new Lavatory layout is shown on drawing number 5. Male toilet facilities are increased from one wc cubicle and two urinals to one wc cubicle and one disabled wc cubicle and four urinals.

The Female toilets are increased from one disabled wc cubicle and one wc cubicle to three wc cubicles and one disabled cubicle. All disabled cubicles will be fully compliant with Part M of the building regulations.

The works are remodelled within the existing footprint of the annex with a more efficient use of space. The toilet annex has been built at various times off the brick / block boundary wall of the adjacent shop development. It is advised that the existing toilet block should be demolished and a new extension re-built.

Insulation.

The scope of the works will be classed as substantive by the building control department and the works will thus need to improve insulation values and reduce running costs. It was proposed to evaluate the relative merits of internal insulation and or external insulation within the need to maintain the original Art Décor design. Internal insulation is the submitted solution.

Kitchen. The kitchen will be partially reduced in length and will need to be remodelled once a new functional requirement is established, possibly with a tea / coffee server positioned in the main hall.

Stores adjacent to West Wall.

The stores will need to be demolished to repair the floor, and possibly rebuilt from floor to ceiling to provide additional storage at first floor.

Meeting Rooms within the Hall.

In response to members suggestions that a lettable usable meeting room would be of benefit, a possible solution was submitted on drwg. 05A, with usable access to a meeting room using the fire door. The scheme maintains a hall store for chairs and tables to facilitate flexible usage of the hall, with additional offices over.

The boiler repositioned in the toilet area would provide hot water to wash hand basins with a short water heating time lag. Client exploring the replacement of the boiler to serve all heating and domestic hot water requirements.

Ramp. The 140 mm difference in floor level between hall and chapel annex will be accommodated by a ramp. The 70 mm difference in floor level between toilets will be accommodated by a new lower-level floor slab.

Action - The report and drawings have been submitted as a Pre-Application to MTCBC and to the Baptist Union Ecclesiastical Exemption Buildings Panel for comment. The comments of the Pre-App are incorporated in the application for Listed Building Consent.

During this assessment period an approximate Cost Plan will be prepared for the various works packages.

Philip Griffiths.

27.06.2020