

Project & Site Address: Proposed Remodelling of Chapel Hall at High Street Baptist Chapel, Lower High Street, Merthyr Tydfil.

Date: August 2020.

Introduction

The document has been prepared in support of the listed building consent planning application to a level of detail appropriate to the importance of the heritage asset and the scope of the proposals. The document should be read in conjunction with the submitted drawings.

Scope of works.

The proposed works comprise repairs and refurbishment to minimise water penetration, improve the functionality of the building and to reinstate historic features.

Statement of significance.

The church was Grade II listed on the 22nd of August 1975.
Listing reference number 11451 and is described below:

Constructed in 1840 in the classical style, High Street Baptist Chapel is situated in Merthyr Tydfil town centre, set back off the pedestrianised area of the High Street on a raised terrace. The site is enclosed with brick walls and iron railings.

Constructed in the early 19th century, during a period of growth and wealth from the ironworks town, which benefited greatly from the railway construction boom as demonstrated by the wealth and diversity of the surrounding architecture.

High Street Baptist Chapel is a very early example of a chapel with classical façade. One of two chapels in Merthyr Tydfil designed by London Architect T.H. Wyatt. Many of the original features have been lost over time, including the pediment cross, wrought iron railings and the original interior.

Some repairs had not been sensitively carried out, but these have in the main been corrected in the recent refurbishment of the main chapel.

Extract from Heritage Statement on Chapel Building prepared by Caroe & Partners, November 2015.

Interior

Fine 2-storey interior with cast iron columns supported 3-sided panel gallery, arcade treatment at gallery level. Great platform with pulpit, big seat etc two in a wall.

Exterior

Bold neoclassical front of three bays, painted render with advanced, pedimented centre parapets to side bays, gable crucifix. Bracket cornice, band course under recessed 'High Street Chapel' tablet, deep cornice over banded rusticated ground floor. Pediments to outer first-floor windows with leaded glazing, plain ground floor windows. Monumental centre entrance with plain arch to later vaulted porch breaking through corners, detached Doric columns to jams, twin pilasters flank segmental inner doorway.

One-bay return flanks in similar style, then 4-bay simple walls with plain bands and round headed upper windows with tracery.

Extract from Cadw listing.

Relevant History

The church was originally built with a rear single storey annex housing the school room built with high tie collar ceiling and served by a rear entrance door. The room is since much altered and partitioned into a corridor, minister's office, and part of the toilets. The rear annex is included in the current application for LBC.

The hall was constructed in 1928 in the Art Décor style as a stand-alone structure separated by a lane giving access to the housing courts on the south of the chapel. The land was eventually purchased by the chapel and infilled with the hall kitchen circa mid-20th century. The Kitchen infill and the hall is not included in the primary listing but is now deemed to be included in the listing by association and is thus forms part of the application for Listed Building Consent.

The Church Hall constructed in 1928 in the Art Décor Style, is located to the rear of the chapel occupying a prominent position in the pedestrian walkaway linking the proposed bus station and the town centre. The pavement laid in grey granite Chinese pavours to a random abstract pattern does little to enhance the conservation setting of the chapel or Lower High Street.

Interior

Five decorative Art Décor pilasters on each side define the external wall panels set with central hardwood casement windows or entrance doors. Modern storage rooms built in stud and plasterboard along the west wall and other repairs and other functional improvements to the hall including a suspended ceiling have perhaps not been sensitively carried out.

Further exploration of the hall roof space reveals a dual pitch steel latticed roof truss built to a 26 degree roof pitch under SW purlins and rafters and a curved / arced SW joisted ceiling set in lathe and plaster and down stand beams lightly decorated at the wall junctions in the art décor style. See separate report to chapel dated Nov. 2020.

Exterior

The roof was originally finished in Welsh slate, but now only the south roof remains original as the north roof is asbestos slates. The north roof is set to a heavy timber dentil cornice formed from a unique double wall plate feature and set over painted harling render. The south roof is set on a modern SW fascia over a painted fined down render rising from a render plinth.

The windows and entrance doors are framed in ornate render reveals and windows set to pre-cast concrete sills. The main entrance door is surmounted by an ornate concrete and dentil canopy.

The west gable elevation consists of a mixed array of gable ends from demolished industrial terraced housing, rendered, and over painted with the Merthyr Townscape Mural. Due to the poor structural condition the gable wall containing the mural needs to be demolished and rebuilt.

The mural is regarded as an important pictorial evidence of the townscape of Merthyr Tydfil as a historic iron town. The client wishes the mural to be repainted as a facsimile copy or reproduction due to its prominent position adjacent to the proposed pedestrian route from the new bus station into lower High Street. A local artist has been commissioned to repaint the mural and the artists mock-ups are shown on drawing numbers 11 and 12.

The hard cement render is badly cracked and spalling away from the structurally unsound wall which is presumed to be part concrete blockwork infilled on stone masonry laid in aged black lime mortar. The irregular upper wall profile at roof level lacks lead flashings and soakers at the abutment to adjacent tiles and thus leaks water back into the hall.

Unfortunately, the level of render repair required would obliterate a large portion of the mural which is badly faded and itself in need of renovation. The logical decision is thus to demolish, build a waterproof, insulated and aesthetically pleasing cavity wall and repaint the mural on the flat surface created.

There are no other alternative solutions worthy of consideration that will replicate the existing design.

The main chapel building was extensively repaired between 2016 and 2018 and is not included in the current listed building consent application (LBC).

Relevant Planning History.

P/15/0391 – Installation of new boundary walls, railings, gates and wheelchair accessible ramp and reinstatement of pediment stone cross. Planning permission approved – 17.02.2016

P/15/0390 – Repairs to church roof, walls, and rainwater goods. Installation of new boundary walls, railings, gates and wheelchair accessible ramp and reinstatement of pediment stone cross. Listed Building Consent Approved – 17.03.2016.

Statement of Need

The primary function of the church remains as a place of non-conformist worship; however, the Chapel plays a key role in the wider community providing important facilities for a wide range of people.

Repairs to the Church have been completed in 2018. Repairs to the Chapel Hall are urgently required to prevent further decay of the building fabric. The Building Condition Report identifies the building defects and forms the basis of the LBC application.

Conservation Philosophy.

The philosophy of repair and the care of historic buildings is based on the premise that as much as possible of the early fabric should be retained, and that intervention in the structure except where alterations are necessary for continued use of the building are kept to a minimum; and that the basis for the conservation of any building should be continued attention to daily care as the basis of sound management.

Philosophy for fabric repairs

Policies are to be framed around a presumption that the existing fabric and contents of any historic building will be preserved as far as it is consistent with the maintenance of the original purpose of the building. Conservation strategy in relation to specific elements of the building may vary from overall policy in detail.

Reconstruction will only take place when and where the structural integrity of any element is threatened, or the element ceases to perform its original structural waterproofing function. Where reconstruction is necessary then what is left in the original structure should either be retained in situ and strengthened by such visible means as is necessary or be suitably recorded before removal.

In any conservation decision, it must be recalled that the history of many buildings almost always reflect continual change of fabric and appearance. The conservation strategy may reflect this reaction to continual and established use.

In considering stonework and ornamental render repair and conservation, the line and architecture of the building should be respected. It will often be appropriate to restore badly eroded or missing details of string courses, cornices, and carved detail etc. where the line and understanding of the architecture is marred by the absence.

Conservation of existing features should be employed where sufficient of the feature remains to define the line of the building.

Carpentry, roof structures, floor structures and alike should be retained and preserved and repaired where necessary to retain their original structural function and design. The addition of strengthening features should be avoided unless the original structure is so severely weakened that it cannot be made to perform as its original design without substantial replacement of fabric.

Roof coverings may have historic interest, and there may be a case for conserving rather than replacing early roof coverings. Slate or tile covering should be relayed using the original material where possible, using similar sources where necessary.

A record of all work undertaken in repair or conservation should be made during the work and placed in an archive at the completion of the work.

Conclusion

This statement has been prepared and is commensurate with the significance of the proposals and their effect upon the heritage asset.

The proposals meet all the criteria for the area and will not have an adverse effect on the conservation area. The proposals will in fact improve the appearance of the church overall and add to the diversity of the street scene, while the repairs will slow the decay of the building fabric.

The following building works are identified as potentially impacting on or restoring the original building fabric and design.

School Room Roof: The modern long rafter low pitch mini concrete tile roof has to be removed and the original dual pitch slate roof over the school room replaced. The tie collar to be strengthened with the insertion of steel beams and chord ceiling joists. Note these works are required to correct the latent 'long rafter' roof defect which is causing the building to leak.

Velux Sun Tunnels to be fitted in the slate roof to illuminate internal corridors and rooms.

Toilet Block: To be rebuilt on the existing footprint in rendered blockwork with a flat roof over, ~~finished in single ply membrane or fibre glass roof set with orangery rooflights~~ with a pitched roof over. Subsequent amendment see updated HIS overleaf.

The original south wall of the school room will need to be largely demolished and the upper wall supported on steel beams at wall plate level to enable construction of the toilets to the plan form.

The chapel will represent the 19th century classical style of architecture, the school room will represent the early 20th century Art Décor architecture and the new Toilet Block will represent current 21st century architecture linked by a unifying render and colour finish.

Merthyr Townscape Mural: Repainted on a new flat wall aesthetically capped in a slate verge.

Windows and Doors: replaced to original details.

New sash window to kitchen infill to provide a balanced and matching fenestration along the north elevation.

Wall Insulation: ~~External wall to be insulated externally using Parox insulated panels on a pennant sandstone plinth, finished in a course fined down render and masonry paint to replicate the existing finish on the main chapel. New wider stone sill to be inserted in the same profile. This work to be detailed and submitted as a planning condition.~~

Walls to be insulated internally see updated HIS overleaf.

Roof Insulation. Fibre glass insulation will be inserted over the ceiling joists and the suspended ceiling removed to re-instate the existing Art Décor curved ceiling in the hall. A new plasterboard ceiling in the school room.

Philip Griffiths – Architect.

Toilet Block.

The original intention was to rebuild the toilets on the existing footprint with a fibre glass flat roof with lantern light acting as a neo-classical link between the two main building blocks.

This architecturally correct solution is not deemed correct by the LPA, although no explanation has been received despite numerous requests.

The re-submitted scheme deploys a pitched roof finished in Welsh slate. The design is considered overly heavy and will detract from the neo classical design of the main chapel and the Art Décor design of the hall.

External Wall Render.

To be executed in a Sika render – see specification sheets.