

Heritage Impact Assessment and Statement of Significance/Justification (HIA/SS) for the:

Repair, re-ordering and change of use, of St Catherine's Church Hall at the junction of Old Road and School Road, Melincryddan, Neath. P2024/0373 | Change of use of 1980's prefabricated Hall (D1 use class) to a two-bedroom dwellinghouse (C3 use class) and associated works.

NOTE: Whilst this HIA/SS has been produced for the whole of the site, only the parts that impact upon the former Church Hall are relevant directly to the current Planning and Listed Building Application. This modern but redundant former church hall is attached physically to the rear of the Victorian church and although of no real architectural, or historical significance (as described later) cannot be entirely disassociated from the site in which it sits. The application will not detract from the Victorian Church or its setting.



Address of application site: St Catherines Church Hall, School Road/Old Road, Melincryddan, Neath, Neath Port Talbot. (Revision One, July 2024).

Applicants/Clients: Mr. Richard and Mrs. Neda Canning, trading as 'Old School Creative Space'.

Planning Consultant: Atrium Planning Consultants, Fao: Mr Mathew Fury, MSc. MRTPI.

Historic Building Adviser: Trevor J. Francis MSc. (Strathclyde), MRICS, MCIOB, MCABE, Dip. Architectural Conservation (Bristol). CIOB Certified Conservation Specialist (Building Surveying Practitioner). RICS Registered Valuer.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Application for Planning and Listed Building Consent for various internal and external alterations in association with the conversion, repair and maintenance of the '1980's prefabricated Church Hall' that is redundant and functionally obsolescent in its present guise.

The Description of the current work proposed by this application, focusses upon (Phases One, Two and Four):

Former Church Hall

Internally: removal of glass-fibre and mineral fibre lay-in grid ceiling tile support systems and suspended ceiling grid, fit plaster boarded and insulated ceilings, encapsulate existing old thermoplastic tiles with modern finishes, strip out the existing male and female toilets and refit to serve the proposed new internal layout and meet building regulation standards, construct internal partitions using lightweight timber studding and plasterboard partitioning.

Externally; repair existing fibre-cement slates on modern church hall; indent formed in the east elevation of modern church hall and modern double-glazed doors fitted, PVC framed windows and doors retained and repaired as necessary, repair and repoint rubblestone walls of the church perimeter boundary features, repair flashings on covered staircase link with code 5 or heavier cover flashings at the intersection with that of the main church, repair concrete tiles pitched roof covering on covered staircase link, repair /replace existing flat felt built-up modern roof coverings on covered staircase link to match existing or utilise similar but enhanced products, repair / replace PVC clad with decayed timber beneath as found, reinstate gate piers at the road junction with the Old Road'.

Installation of two windows within the principal elevation of the church hall.

Trevor J. Francis, MSc, MRICS, MCIOB, MCABE, Dip. Architectural Conservation (Bristol). CIOB Certified Conservation Specialist (Building Surveying Practitioner). RICS Registered Valuer.

Chartered Building Surveyor, Chartered Builder and Historic Building Consultant.

Installation of new internal and external doors to the existing covered staircase link with St Catherines Church.

Installation of two Velux windows within the north-western roof slope and six Velux windows within the south-eastern roof slope.

Removal of the majority of the rear external wall of the church hall to create the covered outdoor space, the works for which would include blocking up the existing windows within the north-western side elevation and one existing window within the south-eastern side elevation, together with the installation of full width bi-folding doors within the resultant rear elevation.

To expand further with regards to the:

1.1.1 Modern Church Hall Exterior:

Fascia, barge and soffits: currently covered with PVC materials will be retained.

- Rainwater services: The white PVC rainwater gutters and downpipes will be cleaned and overhauled, renewing to match locally, if necessary.
- Exterior walls: In time, as and when funds allow it may be practicable to suggest an EWI system externally, but this would form part of a separate application and depend upon funding. Blue Pennant and reconstituted Bath stone details to the front elevation to be retained. These are bedded in cement-based mortars.
- Vehicle parking: This to be as existing. No change planting will be softened and reinstated.
- The rear nursery/Sunday school, child's play area will become the rear garden for the residential section proposed. The pre-application consultation document referred to potential risks of overlooking neighbouring dwellings, but this can be addressed simply by appropriate planting of green hedging and fencing if necessary, and is far less invasive potentially than the existing play area which had soft landscaping and was being used as a playground. The site is relatively private and the potential for impacts on neighbouring properties are extremely modest.
- Installation of two windows within the principal elevation of the church hall. Required as part of the Atrium Planning Design and client reuse of this otherwise redundant building.
- Installation of new internal and external doors to the existing covered staircase link with St Catherines Church. Required as part of the Atrium Planning Design and client reuse. The existing doors are modern and of no architectural or historic significance, whatsoever. The interior doors and partitions are for fire separation and located within the church hall and link, so that it is compartmented for Building Regulation fire purposes from that of the Victorian Church. They do not detract from the Victorian building and are not within it.
- Installation of two Velux windows within the north-western roof slope and six velux windows within the south-eastern roof slope. Required as part of the Atrium Planning Design and client reuse of this otherwise redundant building. It adds daylighting to the interior and is not visually intrusive within what is a shallow pitch fibre-cement slate

roof covering. The Velux can if required be inset into the roof slating plane with appropriate flashings and conservation lights fitted if necessary. The roof is however covered with modern fibre cement roofing slates and to a very shallow pitch.

- Removal of the majority of the rear external wall of the church hall to create the covered outdoor space, the works for which would include blocking up the existing windows within the north-western side elevation and one existing window within the south-eastern side elevation, together with the installation of full width bi-folding doors within the resultant rear elevation. Required as part of the Atrium Planning's design and client reuse of this otherwise redundant building. It adds daylighting, ventilation and creates an attractive semi-enclosed, external space within the footprint of this 1980's building structure which is otherwise relatively non-descript. It reduces significantly any impact on neighbouring properties and whilst an interesting design concept, will not be apparent from the street or any major, publicly accessible views of the Victorian Church. As discussed in correspondence, the covered garden area will provide a private amenity area.

1.1.2 Modern Church Hall Interior:

- Wall surfaces: the existing internal walls are typically gypsum and hard wall sand and cement rendered and plastered or ceramic tiled in part. Internal wall insulation is the applicant's preferred choice for thermally upgrading to meet building regulation standards. They will address penetrating dampness challenges in very localised areas where presumably minor defects in the construction of the blockwork to the hall bridge cavities and damp courses.
- Floor coverings and surfaces: The suspended timber boarded floor will need to be insulated. Please note the pre-app suggested that the suspended timber wood strip floor was of herringbone pattern oak block flooring which it clearly is not.
- Building services: gas-fired central heating boiler and two pipe heating system's serving pressed steel-panelled radiators.
- Kitchen: a range of standard relatively modern kitchen cabinets will be installed in place of the existing that are similar.

1.1.3 Covered staircase link:

- Walls: Currently, dry-dash rendered
- Doors and Glazing: PVC framed double-glazed units with panic latches. Replaced on a like for like basis.
- Floor: stepped Ferodo nosings and vinyl tiles,
- Concrete roof tiled.

These will remain.

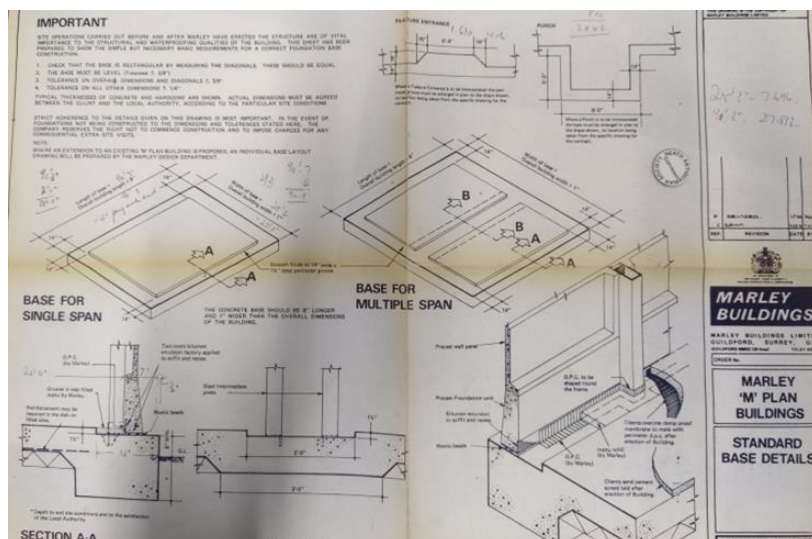
1.2 Background

This site contains the prominent, Grade II* listed former Church building, built in a late Victorian Gothic revival style, but with arts and craft influences, as detailed by its architect, John Coates Carter. The church constructed 1888-91 is of recognised architectural value but has a subservient prefabricated hall, built 1981-83 that links via a traditionally constructed (1980's covered staircase, covered with a felt and tiled roof and PVC framed, double-glazed windows and doors) where attached to a small section of the north wall of the Victorian church.

Although attached to the listed building and hence listed by its fixture, association and curtilage, the modern hall and staircase are associated, simple modern structures that other than for the necessary application of *due diligence and procedural/regulatory compliance*, are ones that it would be extremely difficult when preparing this document in 2024, to justify scholarly debate, archival research, or a heritage significance statement, as they appear to have little or no significant historic, architectural or heritage value.

The hall is a functional, standard, 'Marley' prefabricated steel framed system-built structure with pre-cast reinforced concrete, exposed aggregate, plank wall cladding panels hung externally, beneath what is today a black, fibre-cement slate roof covering, but which prior to stripping and recovering by the Parish on behalf of the Church in Wales a decade or more ago, was previously covered with Marley Modern' inter-locking, concrete roof tiles. The earlier fitted, concrete-tiled roof (from the staining apparent internally) appeared to have failed. Many such buildings exist and were built in large numbers across the UK in the 1970's and 80's as small, lightweight workshop and garage buildings, halls, sports changing facilities and temporary classrooms.

An image of the typical constructional form (other than suspended timber strip ground floor used in place of the slab is shown) but with minor modifications made to foundation details to suit the specific needs of the sloping site:



The Church had planned to build a traditionally constructed structure, but costs precluded this and hence built a rubble sandstone façade to the part of the front elevation and lined the concrete wall-panels internally with concrete block walling, cement render and gypsum plaster, to attempt to engender a slightly softer visual integration.

The former church hall was previously lower down Old Road but had been converted prior to this into the Melincryddan Community Centre, a function it continues to serve today.

Both St Catherine's Church and the attached modern Hall, closed formally in 2016 due to declining congregations, local needs and insufficient funding being available for ongoing repair/operation of the premises. This site (as per the Church in Wales standard protocol of closing buildings) was marketed extensively for sale via commercial agents: RJ Chartered Surveyors, with the Church interests vested in the Representative Body of the Church in Wales. When it was purchased by the applicants in the summer of 2023 the building was in a stage of ongoing decline and decay (some of which is being addressed by emergency repairs) but faced inexorable challenges imposed by functional, technical and economic obsolescence. It is worth pointing out to those who may not be familiar that when the Church in Wales dispose of buildings, they give formal notice (posting details on the premises, well in advance) and impose numerous restrictive covenants upon purchasers, as part of the conditions of sale that preclude anti-social uses for the site in perpetuity. These impact on both the purchaser and any subsequent acquirers of a site; insisting on far more demanding limitations than the secular Town & Country planning system could ever potentially enforce. The applicants have accepted these terms and are working within them in good faith.

Proposals for the prefabricated hall section of building, are shown on the drawings which accompany this Phase One/Two and Four stages of the Planning and Listed Building application. These should be read with the separate pre-purchase Building Survey and numerous annotated photographic plates that accompany and which should be viewed as an integrated part of the submission for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consents.

Works currently proposed, break down into a series of suggested phases but only phases One, two and four form part of the present application:

- (i) Phase One: Immediate minor repair, maintenance and conservation of the fabric of the church building to keep it wind and water-tight.
- (ii) Phase Two: Conversion of the Hall as a dwelling for the applicants allowing them to secure, maintain and continue to care effectively for the building and site.
- (iii) Phase Three: Considered conservation with minor interventions to repurpose slightly, the interior of the Victorian former church for use as a community art-based heritage centre with provision of appropriate modern facilities. Details for this Phase will form part of a separate future application.
- (iv) Phase Four: Minor works to the immediate curtilage. Please note that during the preparation of this Heritage Impact Assessment/Statement of Significance, an uninsured driver crashed into the gate piers at the road junction with Old Road. The applicants are now faced with the cost of reinstating this feature through no fault of their own.

The applicants are experienced art teachers who are passionate about the use and sensitive re-use of old ecclesiastical buildings. They had scoured the UK property market in search of a suitable community building for a number of years, specifically choosing Neath Port Talbot as a place to live, work and invest time and money in. They viewed many redundant buildings across South Wales and the West Midlands for their intended community arts-based applications and were seeking an urban site in preference to a rural chapel or church as they sought a dense local population, proximity to public transport, infrastructure and a community with whom they could engage and contribute to actively.

Whilst Churches and Chapels represent some of the finest Architectural, historic and cultural structures in the land, as well as being objects of faith, remembrance, affection and respect; they face inordinate ongoing challenges. With more than 6500 Chapels and in excess of 1000 churches in Wales, the need for a clear vision as to how alternative, low-impact viable use can be achieved that will sustain the fabric and history of such significant buildings is becoming increasingly critical. Listing alone, will not prove successful and viable new uses have to be accepted by all. This proposal offers hope and scope for re-use.

Both Cadw and Welsh Government (WG) agree, stating that:

Conservation is about the careful management of change; hence it is necessary to understand the implications of any proposed changes. Understanding the historic asset and its significance is fundamental to sound decision-making. Once significance is established, the potential impact of any changes proposed can be evaluated and adapted where necessary to arrive at an appropriate solution.

The purpose of this Heritage Impact Assessment/Statement of Significance (HIASS) is to better inform parties thereto, and in particular both the owner/applicants and decision-makers, such that they can make appropriate, informed decisions.

A Heritage Impact Assessment/Statement of Significance is a structured process to ensure that the significance of the historic asset is considered when developing and designing proposals for change. It should play a key part in the design process, and test whether the proposals for change are appropriate by assessing impact on the significance of the asset. It helps ensure that changes minimise harm and maximise benefits. The results of the heritage impact assessment are summarised within this heritage impact statement. This will give all parties the information they need to understand and reason the proposals, weighing risks and benefits.

This Heritage Impact Assessment/Statement of Significance (together with its directly associated annotated photographic plates) must be read together as a single integrated entity with the full LBC/planning application submission, Design and Access Statement, the proposed and existing architectural drawings produced by Atrium Planning Design Consultants and the pre-purchase Building Survey which recorded the condition of the building in 2023.

Towards the end of this document, a detailed analysis of the proposals is evaluated for Phases One to Four. Phase Three which entails repurposing of the Victorian section of the building will be subject to subsequent application that is only outlined hereto.

Phase One: comprises traditional repairs to localised areas of: Welsh slating, lead work, lime mortar pointing only where necessary using traditional lime-based mortar mixes, painting and cleaning. These works will be undertaken in a conservation manner and given their limited nature will not normally require listed building consent however, this will be obtained if the scope is deemed such to warrant.

Phase Two: This is as the application description above and in the submitted planning application drawings currently associated. It is critical to allow the ongoing care of the building. The applicants have to be based at the site practically to achieve their goals and allow appropriate custodianship and stewardship. They have limited funding or access to funds for this purpose. Note this current phase will have minimal aesthetic change in the external appearance of the hall. Changes will be limited to the rear sections of the hall and the former children's Sunday school play area, other than the minor additions of in-line velux windows, a few replacement doors and alterations of windows to the modern sectional, prefabricated hall. Visually the changes are extremely modest.

Phase Three: this will as part of a separate future application entail the minor reordering of the church nave interior and a sensitive reuse scheme will be developed. Irreversible damage will not arise and enhancement of the interior fabric and function enabled, external façades will remain untouched other than for repairs.

Phase Four: entails the maintenance and upkeep of the site, localised enhancements, etc.

1.1 Objective

To ensure the ongoing care, repair and conservation of this Grade II listed building and generate a sustainable reuse will need to take a phased approach. The repair, conservation and upgrading of the asset is essential to allow viable uses to continue.

This Heritage Impact Assessment/Statement of Significance and Justification (HIA/SS) has been produced to support a series of applications for LBC/Planning Consent. The construction and broad condition of the building is as shown and documented in the associated 'Annotated Photographic Plates' to be read as part of this HIA/SS document; as well as the application drawings. The Planning and Listed Building consent submission that illustrates the existing and proposed works will be produced by Mr. Mathew Fury, of Atrium Planning Design Consultants.

Conservation is (as stated earlier) about the considered and careful management of change. (Welsh Government, PPW).

Cadw agrees, stating: '*Conservation is about managing change*'.

TJF Comment: *'We must all accept that buildings are operational facilities that need a purpose and functional use, they have to evolve to meet evolving societal and economic demands. They are not museum artefacts that can be retained in aspic; thus, it is how changing needs can be effectively accommodated, that is key. Obsolescence in its many facets has a profound impact upon how buildings can be supported and cared for, if redundancy and loss are to be mitigated. Conservation is only sustainable as a philosophy and practice, if an appropriate occupier and viable use exists.*

As a listed building, reasons for retention are slightly different and discussed later but still have to meet modern legislative requirements, especially those related to operational use whilst having viable, sustainable, futures. Without a client prepared to commit funds, time and endeavour, listing alone is an extremely blunt instrument that will never sustain our historic estate.

1.2 The Applicants Vision

The existing Church building is that in the future that the Victorian Church will be utilised as a multi-faceted community focussed facility that will be planned to include a cafe, art classes, lectures, workspace and events spaces.

This hub will provide high-quality weekend art classes with well-known teachers and lecturers, attracting visitors from other parts of the country and supporting culture and tourism in Neath Port Talbot. Parallel with this, there will be a strong community faction supporting the local community widely and providing space for a diverse range of groups and individuals to exhibit, operate and develop within.

These will be outlined in far greater depth in The Phase Three submission for the church building but they have firstly to establish themselves at the site and secure its care.

The applicants' business has begun making ties to local charities, including the Neath Boys and Girls Club and will work with these and similar groups and institutions to support the improvement of the area, widely. Please see the separate letters of support and results of questionnaires.

2.0 Understanding the significance of the Historic Asset

2.1. Location and Context

As indicated, the church occupies a prominent location at the junction of Old Road and School Road in the Melin area of Neath. Approximately a mile distant from the town centre, it is close to local amenities and is served by public transport with bus stops nearby. Mainline train stations exist within Neath town centre as well as the Victoria Gardens bus terminal and through coach facilities, outside of the railway station. It is foreseen that some of the activities offered by the proposed centre will attract prominent speakers and visitors from further afield, who will stay in local guesthouses and hotels when contributing and partaking of the centre's activities. The proximity to the town centre and its facilities is seen as a positive. Although the church is on a sloping site it is well connected and readily accessible for many walking from the town centre.

Melincryddan is very mixed from a social/economic perspective and has in the past been designated a Community First area. Whilst some regeneration has taken place, it is one that is still in need of major regeneration initiatives and certainly one that would greatly benefit from the input of an innovative cultural centre, accessible to all. The applicants are young, passionate, creative individuals with a clear vision of living and working within an urban working-class community, helping generate a welcoming hub to help facilitate social regeneration. They should be applauded for the vision they are showing in one of the most depressed communities in Wales.

2.2 Listed Building Description

Coordinates

Latitude: 51.652 / 51°39'7"N; Longitude: -3.8104 / 3°48'37"W. OS Eastings: 274848; OS Northings: 196355. OS Grid: SS748963. Mapcode National: GBR H2.748F.

Entry Name: *St Catherine's Church*

Listing Date: *5 January 1989*

Last Amended: *8 August 2018*

Trevor J. Francis, MSc, MRICS, MCIOB, MCABE, Dip. Architectural Conservation (Bristol). CIOB Certified Conservation Specialist (Building Surveying Practitioner). RICS Registered Valuer.
Chartered Building Surveyor, Chartered Builder and Historic Building Consultant.

Grade: II*

Source: Cadw. **Source ID:** 11816

Building Class: Religious, Ritual and Funerary

Also known as: St Catherine's Church, Neath. St.Catherine's Church, Old Road

Location: Prominently situated on the corner of School Road with Old Road.

County: Neath Port Talbot

Town: Neath

Community: Neath (Castell-nedd)

Community: Neath

Built-Up Area: Neath

Traditional County: Glamorgan

History

Church, built 1888-91 to designs of J. Coates Carter, in collaboration with D.M. Davies of Neath. Foundation stone in west wall records that 'this memorial stone was laid by Miss Place of Neath on a site given by Edward Evans esq of Eaglesbush, Neath March 1889'.

Exterior

Tall aisled hall church in austere early gothic style on a sloping site. Bull nosed snecked masonry, ashlar dressings, including irregular stressed quoins, continuous sill and impost bands, plain corbels and plinth. Steep slate roofs, canted over aisles. Raking gable parapets with cross finials. Tall slate-hung fleche with timber louvred band on ridge is the only external differentiation of nave and chancel.

Seven bay S aisle stops short of E end. Gabled and buttressed porch to left, with moulded pointed arched entrance with iron gates, and niche in gable apex above. Ovolo moulding to inner doorway. Similar detail to shallow porch at right end of aisle. 5 lancet windows between these porches, with hoodmoulds, impost and sill bands. Single lancets to W and E end of aisle. Similar detail to 8 bay N aisle, and taller lancets to gabled vestry at E end. Twin circular flues to chimney.

West end of nave has stepped 4 light lancet window with sill band clasped between stepped buttresses, and surmounted by lancet vent at apex; impost and sill band.

Tripartite stepped lancets to E end, with mullioned 2 light windows incorporated under low transom. Lancet vent at apex. Two tall lancets to S wall of chancel.

Interior

Lofty interior with 7-bay timber arcade; angle-braced posts on high stone bases. Second tier of similar arcading in blind clerestory, which houses extremely rare ventilation system comprising arched wooden shutters operated by rope and pulley system. Rendered panels between the shutters. Trefoiled profile to boarded wagon roof with King strut tie beams in upper tier.

Contemporary fittings include fine pulpit in banded granite, low stone chancel screen with iron traceried rail, and traceried reredos, its panels divided by tall finials. Bench pews are also contemporary.

Stained glass window in south aisle, Celtic Studios, 1970; E window by Heaton, Butler and Baine, 1911.

Reasons for Listing

Trevor J. Francis, MSc, MRICS, MCIOB, MCABE, Dip. Architectural Conservation (Bristol). CIOB Certified Conservation Specialist (Building Surveying Practitioner). RICS Registered Valuer.
Chartered Building Surveyor, Chartered Builder and Historic Building Consultant.

Listed at grade II as a fine, early example of the work of Coates Carter, and notable particularly for the quality of its interior, with its distinctive timber arcade and roof structure, incorporating extremely unusual timber ventilation shutters. The church also retains many original fittings.*

TJF, Note: The List Description makes no mention of the Hall that was built in 10984 as it is insignificant.

2.3 Archaeology

2.3.1 The Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales)

accessible on-line Coflein database, entry for St Catherine's, provides only a simplified version of the Cadw entry:

NPRN13730. Map Reference SS79NW. Grid Reference SS7485096356.

Unitary (Local) Authority Neath Port Talbot Old County Glamorgan. Community Neath.

Type Of Site: CHURCH. Period 19th Century.

Description

St Catherine's church is located on the west side of Old Road at its junction with School Road. The church was built in 1888-91 to designs of architect J.Coates Carter in collaboration with D.M.Davies of Neath. It is constructed of rock-faced local sandstone with Bath stone dressings and bands. It is an economical church of lofty proportions, a tall aisled hall church, with lancets, aisled nave and chancel differentiated only by a fleche, and a gabled porch on the south-west.

Inside, timber arcades on moulded stone bases, angle braces. Similar arcading to blind clerestorey, brackets to spring of roof. Cusped profile to boarded roof with King strut tie beams to apex. Fittings include contemporary reredos, pulpit, table font and pews. The pulpit is unusual, of mauve, black and mottled grey marbles. Stained glass includes works by Heaton, Butler & Bayne (1911) and Celtic Studios (1970).

Sources: extracts from Cadw Listing description; J. Newman, Buildings of Wales: Glamorgan (1995), p.458.

RCAHMW, 2 January 2015.

2.3.2 Archwilio:

The portal of the Welsh Archaeological Trusts proffers only the Cadw List Description. The site will have been greenfield prior to the 1890's, despite being close to both Eaglesbush valley and the docks.

2.4 Stained Glass Artwork at this site (Source: Imaging the Bible in Wales Database).

Christ Blessing Children Brought by their Mothers. Firm/studio: [Heaton, Butler & Bayne](#)

*1911; Church of St Catherine, Melincryddan, Neath, Rhondda Cynon Taff
east wall of the chancel*

The Virgin Mary with Christ as a Boy. Firm/studio: Celtic Studios 1970.

*Church of St Catherine, Melincryddan, Neath, Rhondda Cynon Taff
south side of the church.*

2.5 The Original Church Architect

John Coates Carter (1859–1927) an English architect, born in Norwich but notable amongst a number for his design and restoration of churches in South Wales. He partnered John Pollard Seddon from 1884 to 1904 working in the Victorian Gothic revival style but subsequently with Arts and Crafts Movement influences. He later designed the monastery on Caldey Island and St Luke's Church in Abercarn.

Initially, articulated to the local architect J.B. Pearce in Norwich, Carter later became a pupil of, and then assistant to, London-based architect John Pollard Seddon. In 1884, Carter and Seddon became partners and in 1889, after working independently on St Catherine's at Melincryddan in Neath, Carter was given an office in Cardiff from where he was responsible for the design of many churches in South Wales. These included All Saints in Penarth and St Paul's in Grangetown. Buildings modelled on Bodley's St Augustine in Pendlebury. St Paul is described in Newman's *The Buildings of Wales: Glamorgan* as "...the finest late Victorian church in the County of Glamorgan after Bodley's at Roath."

Other churches in Glamorgan by Seddon & Carter, at New Tredegar and Adamsdown are conversely described as being "cheap and simple" with little to reveal the architects' true abilities. The interior of St Catherine's with its timber column shafts would generate a similar comment. Carter was also noted for his work on reredos in several churches, including St Mary (Bridgend) (1921), the Church of the Ascension in North End, Portsmouth (1921) and St Andrew and St Teilo (1924) in Cathays.

In 1904 Carter split from Seddon and began working on his own account. Notable designs as a sole designer include the expressionist All Saints' parish hall in Penarth (1906), a Rhenish-style monastery on Caldey island (1907–13) and St Lukes, a striking stone and concrete church at Abercarn (1923). In 1916 he closed his Cardiff office and retired to Prestbury, becoming church warden. Following the end of the First World War, Carter began designing buildings again and it was during this period that Carter, an exponent of the Arts and Crafts movement, began looking to the past to design churches that ignored modernity and produced a handful of churches that used local materials and identifiable Welsh vernacular motifs.

*See also: BCD Special Report on **Historic Churches**; 17th annual edition (2010) accessed at <https://www.buildingconservation.com/books/churches2010/files/assets/seo/page38.html>, Accessed, May 2024.*

2.6 Draft History of the Hall

Trevor J. Francis, MSc, MRICS, MCIOB, MCABE, Dip. Architectural Conservation (Bristol). CIOB Certified Conservation Specialist (Building Surveying Practitioner). RICS Registered Valuer.
Chartered Building Surveyor, Chartered Builder and Historic Building Consultant.

The following synopsis is extracted from the Rector's remarks made at the official opening of the new Saint Catherine's Church Hall by the Right Reverend John Paul-Hughes, Bishop of Llandaff on Friday 21st of July 1984. It explains the development of the Church during the mid-late nineteenth century as well as the evolution of the hall in its current form.

A background history that was prepared for the dedication leaflet by the modern Hall 'architect' Mr F.K. Davies FRICS, is summarised below:

'New social Hall at School Road, Neath.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the parish church of St Thomas and the ancient church of St Illtyd met the needs of the town of Neath.

In step with Neath's increasing population, the Church of St David in the centre of the town was opened in 1866 and further expansion by the church was necessary in the Melincrythan area, which was met by the completion of Saint Catherine's in 1891.

The next stage was to provide a parish room which was situated in Cryddan Road, in 1904 to provide the facilities of a multi-purpose parish hall. In the course of time, with the changing demand on such facilities, not least because of the opening of St David's Church Hall in 1928 and the construction of the church of St Peter and St Paul at Cimla (This started life as a combined church and Hall in 1964, while on completion of a new church as such in 1970) the hall became fully available for church and other functions.

The parish said about disposing of the parish hall with the original intention of converting the rear part of St Catherine's Church to provide an economic Hall replacement, but the solution did not find favour with the congregation.

The accommodation comprises a hall to seat 200, a kitchen, toilets and cloakrooms, together with an undercover link to Saint Catherine's Church. The main building is a conventional prefabricated structure but the gable end facing School Road has been faced in the same pennant sandstone as that used in the church, built in 1891.'

2.7 Planning History relating directly to St. Catherine's Church and Hall:

Listed Building Consents - until Mr and Mrs Canning acquired the church in 2023, all consents would be via the ecclesiastical exemption process managed by the Llandaff Diocese of the Church in Wales, with faculties granted under the order by the Chancellor.

Planning – Planning Application Documents

N1979/0434 Hall for social functions and Sunday school, approved 18-NOV-79.

N1976/0013 Hall for social functions and Sunday school, approved 23-MAR-76.

Recent pre-application Advice given by Neath Port Talbot Council under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 can be viewed via:

Pre-App. Ref.: Q2023/0129

PROPOSAL: To change the use of the 1980's prefabricated hall from a D1 to C3 property with 4 bedrooms. The structure of the building is to remain the same. The Church will remain class D1 for community use.

LOCATION: Former St Catherines Church and Hall, Old Road Neath Neath Port Talbot SA11 2BT

3.0 Policy Context.

3.1.1 National Planning Context

Planning Policy Wales, Edition 12 – February 2024; outlines the criteria and aims to establish a system setting out how for the benefit of all people, Welsh Government (WG) propose to exercise their functions to promote sustainable development.

WG is required to make a contribution to International, and UK targets for greenhouse gas emission reduction. The Climate Change Act 2008 providing the statutory framework for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK. At the core of the Act is a requirement for the UK to reduce net UK greenhouse gas emissions and CO2 emissions.

The planning system plays an important role in tackling climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Human Rights Act which came into force in October 2000 incorporated provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and enables the UK Courts to enforce these rights. The general purpose of the ECHR is to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and to maintain and promote the ideals and values of a democratic society. It sets out the basic rights of every individual together with the limitations placed on these rights in order to protect the rights of others and of the wider community. The Human Rights Act makes it unlawful for a public authority to act incompatibly with these ECHR rights except where, as a result of primary legislation, it could not have acted differently. The Human Rights Act has implications for the planning system.

This Statement has been prepared taking cognizance of the Welsh Government's Planning Policy Wales, and in particular - Chapter 4 Housing and 6, Distinctive and Natural Places - The Historic Environment (p.129) and Biodiversity and Ecological Networks (p.136). This scheme is about repairing and sustainably conserving the Historic Environment and finding new viable uses that will sustain otherwise potentially obsolescent buildings that would be at risk of being lost.

3.1.2 Primary Legislation

Primary legislation related to land-use planning includes:

- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990
- Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- Planning (Wales) Act 2015,
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015,
- Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979

3.1.3 European Union

Although the UK has exited The European Union (EU), their guidance currently remains active in part, as the contextual backdrop for planning policy and the preparation of development plans, as it was previously the basis of much UK legislation. This being implemented by:

EU legislation (a range of Directives and Regulations, along with judgements of the European Courts).

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in 2006 and the 6th Environment Action Programme 2002-2012.

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) 14 and current EU territorial cohesion agenda¹⁵; and EU funding regimes, some of which the UK is still committed to post 'Brexit'.

3.1.4 Context for Planning in Wales

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 12, February 2024; sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government, supplemented by a series of Technical Advice Notes (TANs). Procedural advice is given in best practice planning guidance and in this aspect, Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales and Managing Change to Listed Buildings in Wales.

The primary objective of PPW is to ensure that the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, as required by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other key legislation and resultant duties such as the Socio-economic Duty.

Future Wales 2020-2040 supports the spatial requirements of Planning Policy Wales and local Development Plans, TAN's etc and establishes where in Wales development should

take place and how these places should grow and change. Future Wales does not repeat Planning Policy Wales' key principles and it does not cover every area of planning policy. Planning Policy Wales will continue to inform the preparation of development plans and development management decisions. It sets a strategic framework to guide future development and policy interventions. It integrates the spatial aspects of national strategies for social inclusion and economic development, health, transport and environment, translating Welsh Government's sustainable development duty into practice. PPW, and the TAN's/circulars represent best practice guidance.

National planning policy and the Wales Spatial Plan should be taken into account in the preparation of development plans. They may be material to decisions on individual planning applications and will be taken into account by the Welsh Ministers and Planning Inspectors in the determination of called-in planning applications and appeals.

Every local planning authority in Wales must prepare a Local Development Plan (LDP) for its area. The LDP is the development plan for each county or county borough council superseding the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and a Strategic Structure Plan.

HIA/SS Comment: The proposed scheme formulated although modest fits within the criteria.

National planning policy argues, that: "Recognising the strengths of urban communities, which are home to the majority of the population of Wales.

HIA/SS Comment for: The scheme as formulated acknowledges, fully supports and endorses.

The Assembly Government's priorities for urban areas are, through integrated approaches, to: secure environmentally-sound and socially inclusive regeneration in those urban areas which require it, so that they become more desirable places in which to live and work; and foster sustainable change, in particular making it possible to live with less noise, congestion and traffic pollution, improving the quality of life.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The scheme as formulated acknowledges and seeks to satisfy such criteria This at a time that many Listed Buildings are challenged by the many faceted aspects of obsolescence and the need to retain occupier in places, both within NPTCBC, Wales and across the UK, as a consequence of climate change, fall-out from the global pandemic, economic challenges, legislation and changing live/work/leisure approaches.

Development can help to arrest the decline in community facilities and deliver environmentally sound modernisation, re-use or replacement of urban infrastructure."

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: This is supported. The proposals are for creating habitation and a creative hub using local staff and contractors as applicable.

The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a duty on public bodies (including Welsh Ministers) that they must carry out sustainable development. In carrying out this duty, actions which public bodies must take include setting and publishing objectives ('well-being objectives') that are designed to maximise its contribution to achieving each of the well-being goals; and taking all reasonable steps (in exercising its functions) to meet those

objectives. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals to help ensure that public bodies are all working towards the same vision of a sustainable Wales. In relation to landscape and seascape matters, the most relevant well-being goal is the achievement of 'a resilient Wales', which would include the need to conserve and enhance statutorily designated areas, the countryside and the undeveloped coast and the conservation of biodiversity, habitats and landscapes.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: This is fully supported.

3.1.5 Cadw's Conservation Principles (2011)

Guidance that specifically relates to the conservation of historic buildings in Wales is founded upon established conservation principles, that ultimately have been developed via the ICOMOS Charters and BS 7913.

Cadw's six principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales are:

1. Historic assets will be managed to sustain their values.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: This is the intention of the application and is one of repair and reinstatement. Interventions made will be modest, minimal and fully reversible. Change of use supports the ongoing re-use and management of the site.

2. Understanding the significance of historic assets is vital.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: This Heritage Impact statement and review of significance reinforces the comments and opinions of both Cadw and RCAHM(W). The most appropriate remediation is one that facilitates the care, conservation and reinstatement of existing features where practicable, using traditional methods (where suitable) and details, reinstatement that is reversible, if in the very unlikely event that in years to come the situation changes.

3. The historic environment is a shared resource.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: Response: To quote William Morris and the SPAB: 'We are only custodians for those that come later'. The proposed repair works will help to sustain the building for the benefit of future generations' retaining character and significance where relevant. The building façade to the front, and sides will remain fully visible and readable. Photographs, Illustrations taken and drawings made before, during and after, of the repaired interior will be available as part of the Planning/LBC procedure

and can also be added to archive material stores and depositories that exist within the community such as RCAHM(W) and GGAT if they seek this, now or in the future.

4. Everyone will be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: Accepted. The building will remain visible and better cared for. Parts of the Building will be open during normal hours and other areas could be visited by agreement. The opportunity for local crafts persons to be involved in the building's care and repair will only add further to the skill base available locally.

5. Decisions about change must be reasonable, transparent and consistent.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: Response: The scheme submitted, attains this criteria, repairing the existing internal fabric.

6. Documenting and learning from decisions is essential.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall Response: The scheme will record and document the works proposed, adding to wider knowledge of this building and its evolution.

Cadw's four heritage values:

1. *Evidential value: The building's form, fabric and detailing record many changes made in past times.*

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: - Agreed.

2. *Historical value: HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: - Agreed, to be retained, and repaired. No significant adaptations or irreversible modifications are proposed*
3. *Aesthetic value: HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: Agreed, enhanced and preserved.*
4. *Communal value: HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: Agreed. Another interest sector will be addressed by this proposal.*

3.2. Local Planning Policies:

3.2.1 Local Authority context -

When producing a Heritage Impact Assessment/Statement (HIA/SS) it is normal practice to consider the County Council's LDP.

The current Local Development Plan was adopted on by the Council on the 28th of February 2019. Under the provisions of the Planning (Wales) Act, the Neath Port Talbot LDP forms the statutory development plan for the Council. Together with the national plan, It will be used as the primary material consideration to inform decisions on planning applications and development proposals.

The LDP sets out land use policies and proposals to control development in the county borough.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy all such criteria.

Key Policies:

5.5 Culture and Heritage P. 84.

5.5.1 Strategic Policy SP21 Built Environment and Historic Heritage P. 84

5.5.8 Policy BE1 Design P. 85

Response: The scheme as submitted meets these criteria.

Further LDP Policies met:

2.2 Objectives

2.2.1 The LDP Vision will be delivered through a number of objectives which will address the key issues facing the County Borough. The objectives are fundamental to the LDP and form the basis for policy development. For clarity, the key issues to which each objective relates are identified.

2.2.2 The first four objectives are considered to be overarching in that they are wide ranging and will inform all areas of the Plan. The area based objectives concern the two identified strategy areas, while the remaining objectives are grouped under the following themes identified in the Wales Spatial Plan:

- Building Healthy, Sustainable Communities

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy all such criteria.

- Promoting a Sustainable Economy:

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy all such criteria.

●Valuing Our Environment;

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy all such criteria.

●Achieving Sustainable Accessibility;

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy all such criteria.

●Respecting Distinctiveness.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy all such criteria.

3.0.19 Policy SC2 Protection of Existing Community Facilities Policy

Any proposals which would result in the loss of an important existing community facility will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that:

1. The facility is surplus to requirements; or
2. The existing use is no longer viable.

3.0.20 Community facilities are a vital part of the life of a community and can help create cohesive communities where people are able to meet and participate in a range of activities, making a fundamental contribution to ensuring the sustainability of communities. The importance of meeting places is vital for health and well-being and helps create communities where residents feel included rather than isolated.

3.0.21 For the purposes of this policy, any facility that serves a community purpose can be defined as a community facility, including community halls, libraries, local or village shops, public houses and places of worship. Where a facility performs (or has performed) an important or central function in the life of the local community, any change to a non-community use will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that the facility is no longer viable or needed by the community and that there is no potential that the building can be used for an alternative or shared community use.

3.0.22 The type of evidence required will vary depending on the type of facility under consideration, but may include details of why the building is no longer in use, what alternative provision there is locally, what other community options have been considered for

the building and evidence to show that reasonable efforts have been made to market the facility for sale or lease for its existing use.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy such criteria. The church and hall building have been vacant for eight years and if the current application were not being proposed, there would be a high risk of the building being lost to vandalism and fire. There are many redundant chapels and churches within the County Borough and it would be a travesty if this building was deemed unsuitable to generate viable appropriate new uses. There are far too many similar buildings deteriorating or being lost in Wales due to decay mechanisms, redundancy, theft and vandalism. It is refreshing to find applicants who are prepared to take on the innumerable challenges posed.

5.1 Communities and Housing "Building Healthy, Sustainable Communities"(12)

Strategic Policy SP7 Housing Requirement

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy this criteria and provide accommodation for the applicants on what is a small windfall location.

5.5 Culture and Heritage "Respecting Distinctiveness"

Built Environment and Historic Heritage

5.5.1 Strategic Policy SP21 Built Environment and Historic Heritage

The built environment and historic heritage will, where appropriate, be conserved and enhanced through the following measures:

1. Encouraging high quality design standards in all development proposals;
2. Protecting arterial gateways from intrusive and inappropriate development;
3. Safeguarding features of historic and cultural enhancement: importance;
4. The identification of the following designated sites to enable their protection and where appropriate (a) Landscapes of Historic Interest; (b) Historic Parks and Gardens; (c) Conservation Areas; (d) Scheduled Ancient Monuments; and (e) Listed Buildings and their curtilage. LDP Objectives: OB 2, OB 23 and OB 24.

HIA/SS Comment for St. Catherine's Church and Hall: The proposed scheme as formulated aims to satisfy such criteria.

Supplementary Planning Guidance reinforcing the LDP and applicable in this context is incorporated in the following document:

The Historic Environment Supplementary Planning Guidance (April 2019)

Conservation Areas

The boundaries of *conservation areas* within the County are shown on the Constraints and Issues Map but the building is not within a conservation area although Melincryddan is linked with the town-centre in the current LDP it is outside the conservation area.

Response: Agreed. No change or impact.

Historic Parks and Gardens

The register of historic parks and gardens in Wales identifies parks and gardens and their settings that make an important contribution to the character of the country and which are deemed important to preserve or enhance.

Response: Agreed, but not applicable.

2.6.18 The register of historic landscapes in Wales should be taken into account in considering the implications of developments, which meet the criteria for *Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)*.

Response: Not Applicable.

Historic Environment Records

Archaeological Sensitive Areas

2.6.22. The GGAT identified *Archaeologically Sensitive Areas (ASA)* within the County and these are shown on the Constraints and Issues Map.

Response: Agreed, but in this instance it is not applicable.

2.6.23 *Listed buildings* are determined on the basis of their importance to the nation, either for their architecture or built quality, or for their historic associations. However, there are a large number of other buildings and undesignated heritage assets which, whilst not of sufficient quality or importance to be listed, make a significant local contribution.

Response: Agreed. This is the thrust of this HIA/SS.

3.4 Ecology and the natural environment

Response: The proposals are largely internal to that of the modern hall. There is no or little impact upon Ecology. The proposed scheme as formulated will satisfy such criteria, with all advice and guidance being considered. The applicants as part of the church conversion are quite willing to make ecology improvements to both the site and the buildings.

Accessibility

Response: The building is readily accessible to pedestrians, cyclists, motor-cyclists and car users, as well as nearby local bus-stops and bus and main-line rail termini in Neath with additional scope for vehicle movements via for those travelling further afield via the M4 and A465 arterial routes. The former Hall already has an existing vehicle crossover of the public footpath and on-site vehicle parking is more than adequate for the current phase of application.

It is against these contexts, that it is requested that the scheme is considered and supported.

4.0 Identifying changes proposed by this the current Phases One, Two and Four application.

4.1 Outline Construction and Proposals.

The following is not an attempt to prepare a building survey of the two distinct properties that are linked by the covered staircase but to report generally on the buildings condition as a base-line starter position and ascertain areas deemed to be of significance. A building survey with a considerable number of annotated photographic slides and comments has been produced previously and should be referred to with regards to this application.

As indicated earlier, the current application is only for work related to Phases One, Two and Four. Phase Three will be the subject of a much more detailed application, specifications and drawings as it directly impacts the Grade II* listed church building. Serious consideration will be given to the impact on the significance of the listed building but appropriately detailed and designed there is no reason whatsoever why this but they should not have an alternative viable use such as a community-based facility and art/exhibition space.

4.1.1 The Modern Church Hall (Significance – Extremely Low).

Exterior (Significance – Low/Very Low).

Roof covering: the existing fibre cement slates will be retained and repaired locally. In line sky-lights can be weathered that they sit in the roof plane.

Fascia, barge and soffits: currently covered with PVC materials these will be retained/repaired.

Rainwater services: The white PVC rainwater gutters and downpipes will be cleaned and overhauled, renewing if necessary.

Exterior walls: The exposed aggregate concrete panels will be retained at present, other than on the East elevation where an indent is to be formed and modern double-glazed doors fitted. In time, as and when funds allow it may be practicable to suggest an EWI system externally but this would form part of a separate application and depend upon funding. Blue Pennant and reconstituted Bath stone details to the front to be retained. These are bedded in cement based mortars.

Windows and doors: PVC framed windows and doors will be retained and repaired as necessary.

Vehicle parking: This to be as existing. No change. Planting will be softened and reinstated.

Paths and boundary walls: The Rubblestone walls of the church perimeter boundary features will be repointed and repaired NHL 2 lime-based mortars with a dark grey/black Blaenavon mix from the Ty Mawr lime company or equivalent. The rear nursery/Sunday-school, child's play area will become the rear garden for the residential section proposed. The pre-application consultation document referred to potential risks of overlooking neighbouring dwellings. This can be addressed by simply by appropriate planting of green hedging and fencing if necessary, but is far less potentially invasive than the existing play area which had soft landscaping and was being used as a playground. The site is relatively private and the potential for impacts on neighbouring properties are extremely modest.

Interior (Significance – Extremely Low).

Ceilings: where glass-fibre and mineral-fibre lay-in grid ceiling tile support systems are currently fitted the tiles will be removed as will the suspended ceiling grid. Plaster boarded and insulated ceilings will be fitted.

Wall surfaces: the existing internal walls are typically gypsum and hard wall sand and cement rendered and plastered or ceramic tiled in part. Internal wall insulation is the applicant's preferred choice for thermally upgrading to meet building regulation standards. Address penetrating dampness challenges in very localised areas.

Floor coverings and surfaces: old thermoplastic tiles where existing will be encapsulated safely, with modern finishes. The suspended timber boarded floor will need to be insulated.

Please note the pre-app suggested that the suspended timber wood strip floor was of herringbone pattern oak block flooring which it clearly is not.

Building services: gas-fired central heating boiler and two pipe heating system's serving pressed steel-panelled radiators.

Kitchen: a range of standard relatively modern kitchen cabinets.

Toilets: strip out the existing male and female toilets and refit to serve the proposed new internal layout and meet building regulation standards.

Internal partitions: any internal modifications to be undertaken in lightweight timber studding and plasterboard partitioning.

The installation of two windows within the principal elevation of the church hall is I understand to improve day lighting and ventilation within the former church hall following change of use. This has no bearing on significance.

The installation of new internal and external doors to the existing covered staircase link with St Catherines Church. Again, this is internal in a modern non-descript extension that is existing. The proposals do not impact negatively.

The installation of two velux windows within the north-western roof slope and six Velux windows within the south-eastern roof slope. This we understand is to enhance daylighting. There is no impact on the significance of the Victorian Church. Please see earlier comments.

The removal of the majority of the rear external wall of the church hall to create the covered outdoor space, the works for which would include blocking up the existing windows within the north-western side elevation and one existing window within the south-eastern side elevation, together with the installation of full width bi-folding doors within the resultant rear elevation. This aids the use of the converted redundant modern hall and has benefits for both occupiers and neighbours. It will virtually be unseen even from a distance and certainly does not impact upon the significance of the Victorian Church.

4.1.2 Covered staircase link (Significance – Low).

Flashings: repair with code 5 or heavier cover flashings at the intersection with that of the main church.

Roof surfaces: Repair Concrete tiled pitch roof covering. Repair/replace flat felt built-up modern roof coverings to match existing or utilise similar but enhanced products.

Fascia Details. PVC clad with decayed timber beneath. Repair/replace as found.

Walls: Dry-dash rendered

Doors and Glazing: PVC framed double-glazed units with panic latches.

Floor: stepped Ferrodor step nosings and vinyl tiles

4.1.3 The late Victorian church **Significance – High.**

4.1.3 Works associated with the remodelling of the church will form part of a Phase Three submission and be subject to separate Planning and Listed Building applications with additional detailing being provided. *The HIA/SS statement was initially produced for the whole site but for clarity, is at present marked with a strikethrough text as it is not part of the current application. It outlines however the well-meaning intentions of the applicants moving forwards and will be expanded upon.*

Exterior: **Significance – High.**

~~Roof coverings: Main roof surfaces are clad with Welsh slate. Repairs are required to localised areas of slating and to secret gutters, flashings and parapet walls. Like-for-like material replacements to be utilised and traditional lime-based mortar where repointing.~~

~~Exterior walls: Square-edged rock-faced Pennant sandstone with bath stone details to windows and quoins. Repair and re-point locally as necessary.~~

~~Window surrounds: Bath stone detailing. Protective guards to stained glass windows to be retained.~~

~~Stained glass windows: re-point locally with lime putty mortar mix where necessary.~~

~~Fascia boards: replace/repair with matching sections as necessary.~~

~~Rainwater gutters and downpipes: currently white PVC sections. Repair and address defective joints/clips, etc. Possible, future replacement but only as and when funds become accessible.~~

~~Chimneystack to the rear: inspect from scaffold and repair as necessary.~~

~~Paths: Tarmacadam and crazy paved paths to be cleaned and repaired locally.~~

~~Grounds: maintenance of grass surfaced areas and cutting back where vegetation had grown wild.~~

~~Doors: stained oak doors. Ease, adjust and redecorate as necessary.~~

~~Porch gates: repair via the use of a blacksmith where not closing.~~

Church Interior **Significance – High.**

~~Ceiling: Ceiling: Stained timber boarded ceiling, columns and trusses. Clean down and treat with a relatively benign preservative if or where signs of any insect infestation may be found.~~

~~Walls: Painted and plaster surfaced. Repair plaster and paint coated surfaces generally once the secret gutters and cover flashings to the parapet above have been repaired. Detailed specs to be submitted as part of the Phase Three works. Where water damaged plaster or gypsum plaster and cement exist these generally to be replaced if possible with a lime-based alternative. Modern mid or late 20th century paint coatings to be removed if funds exist and this can be undertaken safely. Alternatively redecorating with traditional paint colours.~~

~~Floor: suspended timber ground floor areas of stained softwood boards and briquette red clay quarry tiles.~~

~~Fitments: those retained after the church closure to be incorporated within the remodelled interior but as described subsequently in the Phase 3 works.~~

~~Asbestos-based materials: Full details after sampling and testing by specialists is necessary.~~

~~Interior Doors: Upgrade or replace to Fire Safety standards, enhancing fire stopping and compartmentation as required.~~

~~Decay Mechanisms: Address: All damp, timber decay and Mould issues, wherever found.~~

~~Thermal Insulation: Add to acceptable standards using materials appropriate for a Listed building.~~

~~Internal joinery and doors: to be retained/ upgraded as necessary to meet statutory requirements but in a conservation based manner.~~

This LBC/Planning application is hopefully the first of many for this building, but further phases will be subject to sufficient funding becoming available to support the sustainable ongoing use of the premises.

The current application (Phases One, Two and Four) are focused primarily on repair and maintenance other than for the conversion of the former modern but redundant hall to provide on-site accommodation. This is a relatively non-descript structure that is existing and was added forty years ago with consent. The Victorian church remains readily readable. . [This and the stair link are of no real architectural or historic significance other than as utility spaces. Phase Three which is for the interior use of the nave and chancel of the church for community-based art-generated initiatives will be the subject of an entirely separate submission.

~~Building Services and Lighting: The church building should be provided with an emergency lighting system as a supplementary measure together with fire detection systems. Given that modern building services have a relatively finite life these impacts are fully reversible should in the future, the building ever revert. The modern hall/stairwell have Building services that are now between 20 and 40 years old. It is inevitable that even allowing for routine servicing and maintenance that some measures will be necessary and undertaken by accredited~~

specialists as and where necessary. These have no bearing at all on the Victorian premises significance.

4.2 Reasoning behind the preferred option (Phases One, Two and Four).

The architectural and historic significance of St. Catherine's Church and Hall should be viewed within the context of its location, the history and the expansion that occurred in Neath during the mid to late 19th and early 20th centuries. This, as a result of the expansion of the town, the docks (at Briton Ferry and Swansea), coal and metal (copper, iron and tin-plate) and subsequently steel, as well as numerous manufacturing industries.

In recent decades, there has been a dramatic change in the make-up of society, as well as a run-down of most commercial industries, ports and town centres. Churches and social spaces have been heavily impacted by cultural and personal beliefs with countless numbers now either semi-derelict or about to close. Conversion of this redundant former hall into residential is the least invasive and most appropriate use that the building could be put into. Future, sensitive adaptation of the church nave and chancel and reuse as an art centre/training establishment with suitable facilities, supported by the use of the hall as a means of securing a physical residential presence to care for the building is one that we argue should be fully supported and actively encouraged. Indeed, Cadw's Neath Abbey site (Claimed by CADW to be Wales most *'most important and impressive monastic remains in south Wales'* and far more significant when evaluated against all factors; had for many years a similar arrangement where former staff lived in a prefabricated structure to attempt to ward against vandalism theft and inappropriate unauthorised uses.

The applicants are very keen to proactively support a true and balanced egalitarian community and have already invested heavily using the limited resources they have as well as time and commitment into the care and custodianship of the site.

Historic buildings within NPTCBC (like most across the UK) are facing enormous challenges posed by the impact of obsolescence in its many forms, huge societal changes arising from Brexit, the Covid pandemics, inflationary pressures, energy crisis and climate change challenges. This proposal safeguards an existing building with a use that is highly relevant and applicable to a community that needs significant further investment and regeneration activity.

Re-use of this redundant church hall (with appropriate help and support from the public bodies and community) can continue to contribute to the long-term care and sustainable management of this building/site; retaining it for the benefit of all who live and visit Neath Port Talbot.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE / SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC ASSET

IMPORTANCE / SIGNIFICANCE	ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS	HISTORIC BUILDINGS	HISTORIC LANDSCAPES
Very High (international)*	World Heritage Sites Other sites of acknowledged international importance Sites that can contribute significantly to acknowledged international research objectives	World Heritage Sites Other buildings of recognized international importance	World Heritage Sites Historic landscapes of international value, whether designated or not Extremely well preserved historic landscapes with exceptional coherence, time depth, or other critical factor(s)
High (National)*	Scheduled Ancient Monuments Undesignated schedulable importance sites of quality and Sites that can significantly contribute to acknowledged international research objectives	Scheduled Ancient Monuments with standing remains Grade I and all Grade II* Listed Buildings (Scotland Category A) Other listed buildings that can be shown to have exceptional qualities in their fabric or historical associations not adequately reflected in their listing grade Conservation Areas containing very important buildings Undesignated structures of clear national importance	Designated historic landscapes of outstanding interest Undesignated landscapes of outstanding interest Undesignated landscapes of high quality and importance, and of demonstrable national value Well preserved historic landscapes, exhibiting considerable coherence, time depth or other critical factor(s)
Medium (Regional)*	undesignated assets that contribute to regional research objective	Grade II Listed Buildings (Historic (unlisted) buildings that can be shown to have exceptional qualities in their fabric or historical associations Conservation Areas containing buildings that contribute significantly to its historic character Historic townscape or built-up areas with important historic integrity in their buildings, or built settings (e.g. including street furniture and other structures)	Designated special historic landscapes Undesignated historic landscapes that would justify special historic landscape designation, landscapes of regional value Averagely well-preserved historic landscapes with reasonable coherence, time depth or other critical factor(s)
Low (Local)*	undesignated assets of local importance Assets compromised by poor preservation and/ or poor survival of contextual associations Assets of limited value, but with potential to contribute to local research objectives	Locally listed buildings (unlisted) buildings of modest quality in their fabric or historical association Historic townscape or built up areas of limited historic integrity in their buildings, or built settings (e.g. including street furniture and other structures)	Robust undesignated historic landscapes Historic landscapes with importance to local interest groups Historic landscapes whose value is limited by poor preservation and/or poor survival of contextual associations
Negligible*	Assets with very little or no surviving archaeological interest	Buildings of no architectural or historical note	Landscapes with little or no significant historic interest
Unknown*	The importance of the resource has not been ascertained	Buildings with some hidden (i.e. inaccessible) potential for historic significance	

Adapted from Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, Volume II, Section 3, Part 2 (2007)

5.1 MAGNITUDE OF IMPACT ON THE HISTORIC ASSET

MAGNITUDE OF IMPACT	ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS	HISTORIC BUILDINGS	HISTORIC LANDSCAPES
Major	Change to most or all key archaeological materials, such that the resource is totally altered Comprehensive changes to setting	Change to key historic building elements, such that the resource is totally altered Comprehensive changes to setting	Total change to historic landscape character resulting from: Changes to most or all key historic landscape elements, parcels or components Extreme visual effects Gross change to noise or change to sound quality Fundamental changes to use or access
Moderate	Changes to many key archaeological materials, such that the resource is clearly modified Considerable changes to setting that affect the character of an asset	Changes to many key historic building elements, such that the resource is significantly modified Changes to the setting of an historic building, such that it is significantly modified	Moderate change to historic landscape character resulting from: Changes to many key historic landscape elements, parcels or components Visual change to many key aspects of the historic landscape Noticeable differences in noise or sound quality Considerable changes to use or access
Minor	Changes to key archaeological materials, such that the asset is slightly altered Slight changes to setting	Change to key historic building elements, such that the asset is slightly different Change to the setting of an historic building, such that it is noticeably changed	Limited change to historic landscape character resulting from: Changes to few key historic landscape elements, parcels or components Slight visual changes to few key aspects of the historic landscape Limited changes to noise levels or sound quality Slight changes to use or access
Negligible	Very minor changes to archaeological materials, or setting	Slight changes to historic buildings elements or setting that hardly affect it	Very small change to historic landscape character resulting from: Very minor changes to key historic landscape elements, parcels or components Virtually unchanged visual effects Very slight changes to noise levels or sound quality Very slight changes to use or access
No change	No change	No change	No change

5.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPACT ON THE ASSET

MAGNITUDE OF IMPACT	VERY HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	NEGLIGIBLE
NO CHANGE	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
NEGLIGIBLE	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Neutral/Slight</i>	<i>Neutral/Slight</i>	Positive
MINOR	<i>Moderate / Large</i>	<i>Moderate / Slight</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
MODERATE	<i>Large / Very Large</i>	<i>Moderate / Large</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Neutral/ Slight</i>
MAJOR	<i>Very Large</i>	<i>Large / Very Large</i>	<i>Moderate/ Large</i>	<i>Slight/ Moderate</i>	<i>Slight</i>

Adapted from ICOMOS guidance, Jan (2011).

MITIGATION: The works proposed have mitigated as much harm as possible to the asset by good design and minimising interventions necessary to achieve these outcomes. The proposal uses appropriate materials and design, as well as having considered the likely impact upon the setting, surrounding buildings and environment.

6.0 CONCLUSION and OVERALL SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT ON THE HISTORIC ASSET

This application offers the opportunity to provide security and custodianship of the site to aid the protection of a potentially attractive former church building. As well as creating a valuable dwelling unit by converting an otherwise, redundant and largely mediocre system-built building; it could in the future help bring a new use to the site that will enhance the quality of life and culture within the Borough. It brings a fresh use for a new age that is fully inclusive and not simply a regeneration of uses no longer demanded by society.

Significant further repairs and upgrading works are required to the Victorian church building and it is hoped that the authority and funders will be hugely supportive and not at all negative to granting and offering support for this, to ensure the safety and viability of the premises. The applicants have made a huge personal commitment in acquiring these buildings and are working long hours to protect the building and site whilst attempting to attain their vision.

This application offers a viable, continuing and sympathetic use for the buildings on the site. The support of all parties is urged to ensure sustainable ongoing use.

Trevor Francis