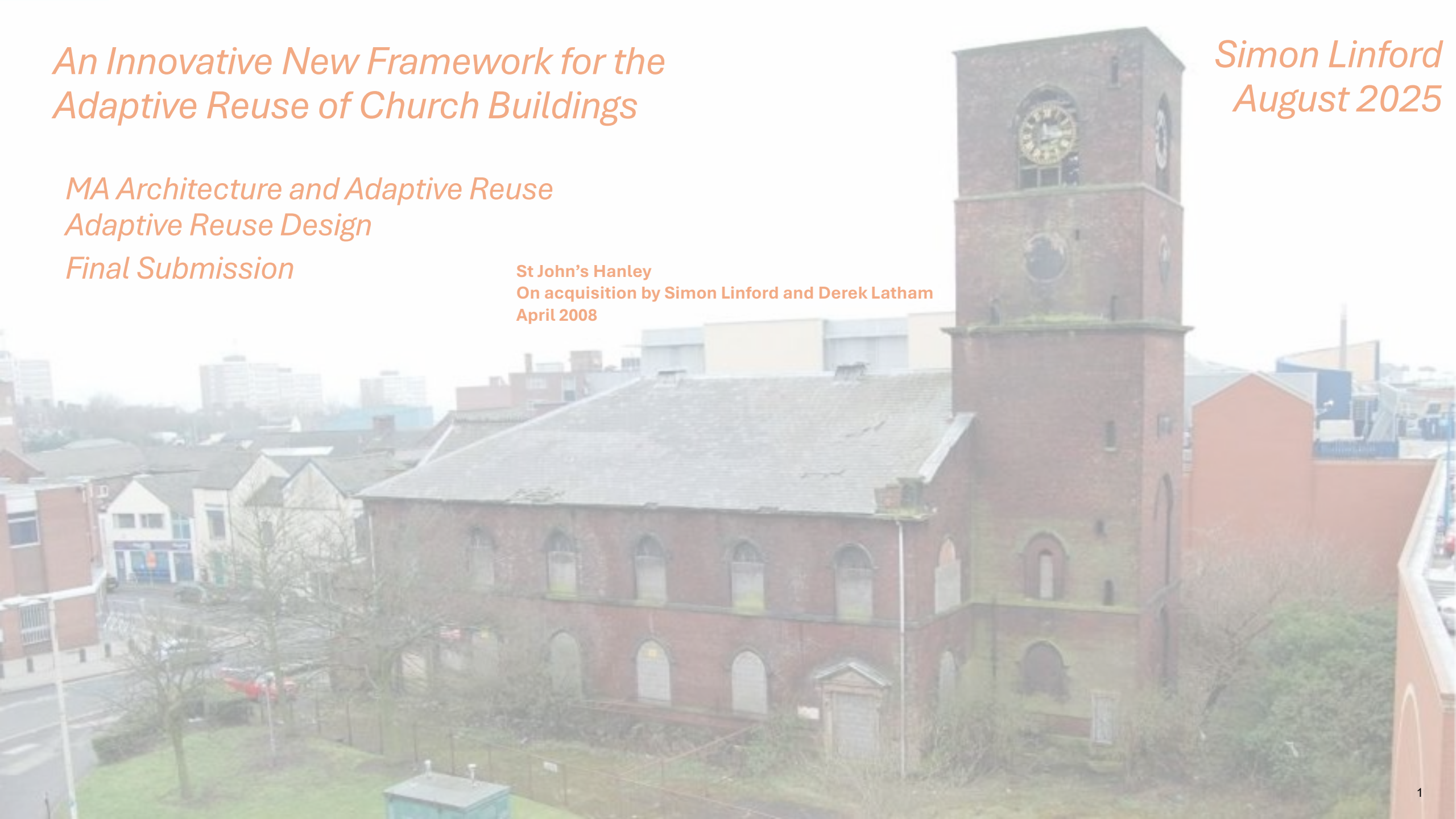


An Innovative New Framework for the Adaptive Reuse of Church Buildings

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August 2025*

*MA Architecture and Adaptive Reuse
Adaptive Reuse Design
Final Submission*

St John's Hanley
On acquisition by Simon Linford and Derek Latham
April 2008



Introduction

The adaptive reuse of church buildings is one of the greatest challenges of the heritage sector. Peter Aiers, the former Chief Executive of the Churches Conservation Trust, described the problem of closing churches as “the single largest heritage issue England faces.”¹ An excess of church buildings, coupled with decreasing church attendance and lack of financial support, is seeing churches either find new uses, or risk being demolished.

However, the closure and adaptive reuse of a church building can be a long and complex process. Closure of a sacred building is highly emotive and most Christian denominations struggle to do it. The buildings themselves have a difficult form to reuse for the types of function that may be able to save them, and local planning authorities often lack the experience and bravery to deal with proposals for churches. Time is wasted across this whole process, and during that time the buildings decay, sometimes terminally.

It is not a problem unique to Great Britain, or to any particular denomination. It is one shared by Christian countries in Europe and the rest of the world to different degrees. Some countries and cultures have a more developed approach to the reuse of church buildings. But in other countries church buildings are languishing empty and at risk.

As a developer of historic buildings with a particular interest in churches I am keen to speed up this process and save and reuse more of these beautiful buildings. Is it possible to develop a ‘framework’ that can inform the adaptive reuse strategy of a particular building, saving wasted time and money in this process?

1. The Battle to Save England’s 19th Century Anglican Churches.
Simon Linford, Dissertation, Manchester School of Architecture, 2025

The overall aim of this project is to develop this ‘Framework’ for the adaptive reuse of churches. In order to do that I will:

- Consider European perspectives
- Present a precedent study of church adaptations of different use types
- Consider architectural form of these precedents in more detail
- Determine the factors that will underpin a possible Framework and explain why they are important
- Test the proposed Framework against a number churches either closed or at risk with example options and designs



The former Chapel of Repton Park Hospital

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“This is truly amazing and could be a real gamechanger” – Guy Foreman, Head of Enterprise, Churches Conservation Trust
17th July 2025



All Saints Hereford, Café and community uses introduced to an active church
RRA Architects, 1997 RIBA Award for Innovation

Experience in other European countries



The Netherlands is a highly secular nation. In the 2001 census, 40% of the population said they were not of any religion, and religion has declined since then. Since Covid, according to a report by Colliers, over 100 churches have closed per year, with financial considerations leading to more disposals.



The Dutch have a long history of adaptive reuse of church buildings. Space is generally too valuable to be left unused and there is a shortage of housing. It has been suggested (Dubois, 2002¹) that some adaptive reuse has been too radical. There is even an agent (Colliers²) that specialises in church disposals particularly for residential use, with high values achieved in high growth areas.



According to an article in the Church Times³, falling congregations in Germany could lead to 40,000 rectories, community centres and places of worship closing by 2060. 1,200 of 42,500 churches have been 'boarded up in recent years, and the Evangelical Church of Hesse and Nassau has confirmed plans to close up to ten percent of its 1,200 churches.

Adaptive reuse of church buildings in Germany appears to be far less developed than in the UK. Catholic churches are being demolished. The residential market in Germany is unlike that in the UK, with the sorts of developers who might convert a building to residential simply not existing.



Belgium has a complex relationship between church and state dating back to the time of Napoleon which has resulted in all religious buildings being owned by local municipalities⁴. Financial responsibility is now shifting to the three Regions, and the Catholic church is recognising the necessity of giving up its buildings for secular use.

Adaptive reuse of church buildings in Belgium seems well advanced and flexible, driven by the civic ownership and decision-making process. Examples can be found of hotels, climbing centres, concert halls, and offices. An agency called PARCUM advises on plans for conversion and the processes required. A project in Watermael-Boitsfort (see precedent study) is set to become the first high density residential conversion⁵.

1. Dubois, M. (2002). Refurbishing the house of God: Adaptive reuse of religious buildings in Flanders. The Low Countries, 2000, 70 –75
2. The Sale of Churches in the Netherlands, Colliers. February 2021
3. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/26-may/news/world/german-churches-face-closure-as-membership-falls>
4. <https://canopyforum.org/2023/05/05/new-perspectives-for-the-reuse-of-catholic-churches-in-europe-from-a-common-problem-to-a-common-good/>
5. <https://www.thebulletin.be/41-apartments-planned-watermael-boitsfort-church>

Experience in other European countries



Although France faces declining congregations like most other European countries, between 1905 (when the church state separation law passed responsibility for maintaining church buildings to the local council) and 2016 only 255 out of over 40,000 churches were closed, although numerous churches and chapels can be found listed for sale on various websites. The process for closing and selling churches is very complicated.

No precedents found

It appears that France has never suffered from multiple churches of different denominations being built in the same town – one of the factors that causes over supply. There is no official approach to the process of closure and reuse of churches.



Under General Franco, Catholicism was the only legal religion in Spain and there was a very close relationship between Church and State. Since the end of that regime in the 1970s, practising Catholicism has dropped dramatically, with Covid and financial pressures adding to the decline. In 2021 the Archdiocese of Barcelona closed 160 of 208 parishes.

The closure of churches, such as that in Barcelona, has not yet led to large scale adaptive reuse, and very few examples can be found – one skatepark, one restaurant in Ibiza, one private house. The fashion retailer Zara converted a former monastery in Salamanca into a flagship store – see page 10.



Italy has a very large number of churches per capita, with 65,000. The country is strongly Catholic, being the home of the Church in Rome, and religion is maintaining its strength more than other European countries. Part of general taxation is paid to the Church. Although the majority of churches are owned by Dioceses, some are owned by the State and Municipalities. None appear minded to close them.¹

There is no fixed process or organisation to deal with the closure of churches and there are very few examples of adaptive reuse although a recent example was featured in Dezeen (right) <https://www.dezeen.com/2025/01/30/caarpa-church-of-nostra-signora-della-costa-italy/>



1. Sizzi, L. ((2021). Opportunities: A strategy for the adaptive reuse of churches.

Experience in some non-European countries



The US constitution gives its citizens the right to do anything they like with their own property, and churches only really become truly protected if they come under the ownership of the National Parks Service. There is no mechanism to decide that a privately owned building should be protected from adaptation, although individual cities and States may consider heritage buildings in planning policies.

Without heritage protection, adaptive reuse of churches (as opposed to demolition) happens because the building adds value to the use or community or is a cheaper option for a developer. There is very little pressure on land use other than in large metropolitan areas. In many cities there are high value residential conversions.



Canada has systems of heritage protection that vary from province to province and in different municipalities. Vancouver for instance uses zoning and developer incentives to protect historic buildings.

In 2020 it was estimated that 9,000 out of Canada's 27,000 places of worship would close¹. This is not evenly spread – in Nova Scotia 20% of churches have already closed whereas in Toronto new churches are being built. A wide variety of new uses are being found for churches, and a number of charities have been established to save churches for community use.



About 10% of Australia's 11,000 churches have closed since 1991². There are relatively few historic churches and very few churches have any form of heritage protection, which is generally more concerned with social and indigenous heritage than religious buildings.

There do not appear to be many barriers to adaptive reuse of churches in Australia, with many converted into bars, restaurants and private dwellings.

1. National Trust Endangered Places List 2020 – A year in review. National Trust for Canada

2. National Church Life Survey 2021 <https://www.2021ncls.org.au/>

Conclusion from consideration of non-UK countries

The approach to adaptive reuse of church buildings changes across Europe in a clear way. It is primarily driven by culture and denomination. There is a clear difference between the northern European countries and the predominantly Catholic countries further south.

Northern Europe

UK, Scandinavia, Low Countries, Germany

Church closure accelerating and advanced processes for closure and adaptive reuse, led by the Dutch, followed by the UK and Scandinavia. Germany is a little behind. The countries are majority Protestant, and the Church is less important/relevant in their culture.

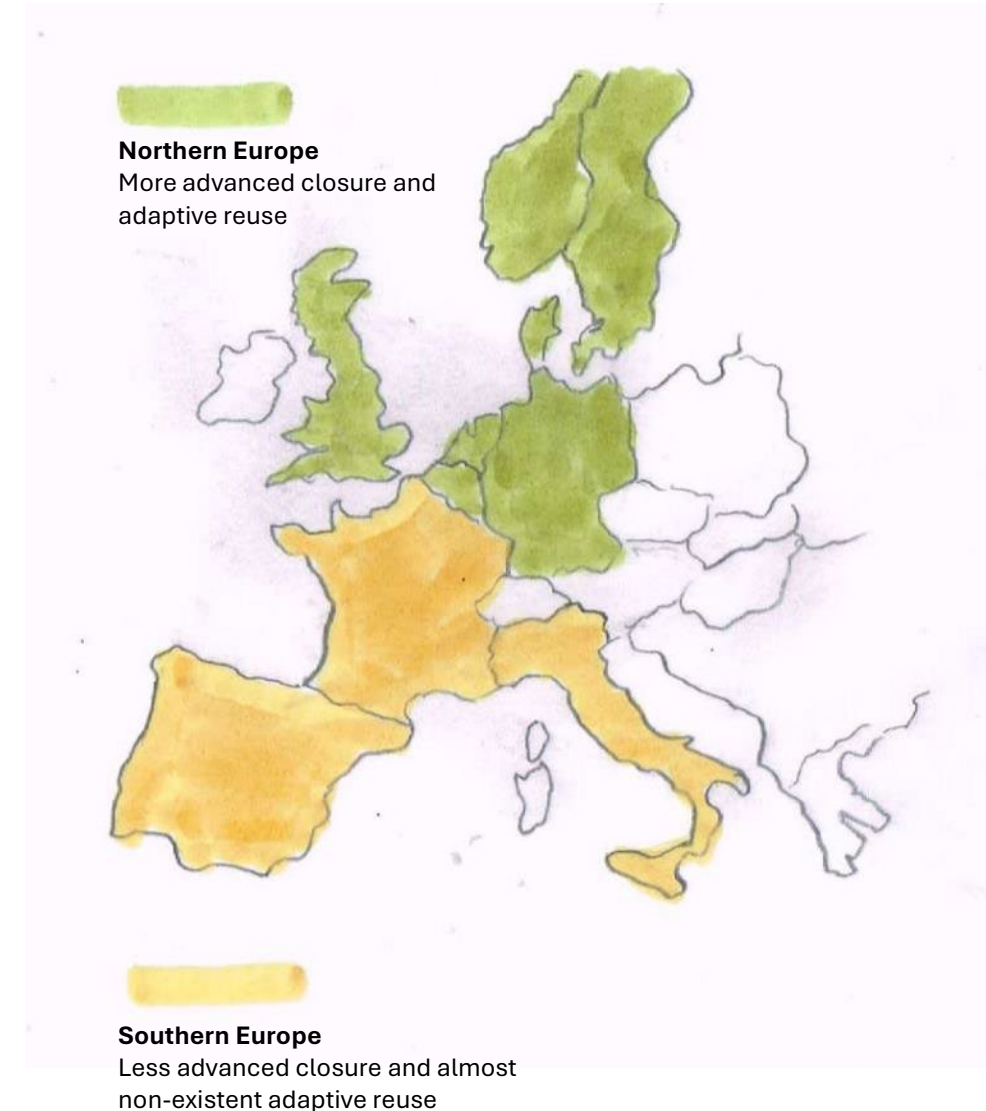
Southern Europe

France, Spain, Italy

France is included because although it would usually be described as northern Europe, it shares characteristics with its southern neighbours. These countries are predominately Catholic, and although they are suffering from the same problems of falling congregations and clergy numbers, they have a less advanced / non-existent process for closure, and hence adaptive reuse, of churches.

Non-European

Whilst little can be learned from Canada and Australia, the United States is the source of some interesting precedents for consideration.



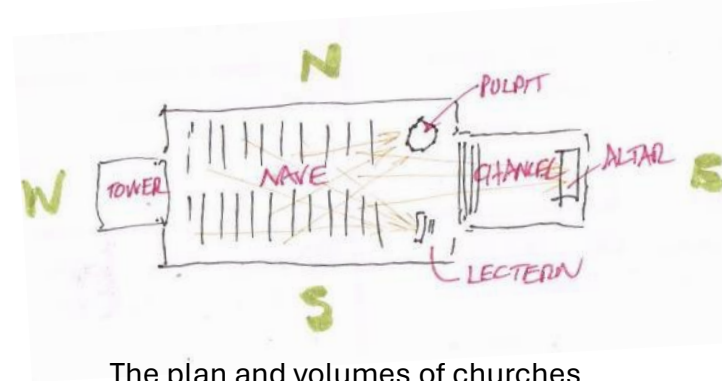
Church building – Form follows Function

That “form follows function” is a design principle suggesting that the shape of a building should be suited to its function or use. If the sole purpose of a church building was to provide a place for people to meet together and worship, a church could be a relatively simple building, like a school or even an office. However, perhaps more than any other building type, the form of a church does something more than just fulfil that basic meeting function – it is a proclamation of who God is, a place that has to evoke spirituality, a physical embodiment of belief in a higher presence which pays its respects in glory.

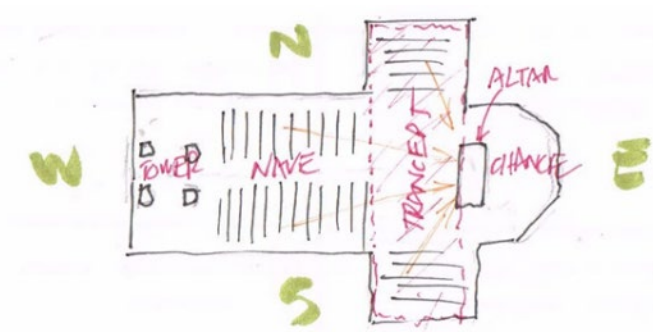
In his book *English Victorian Churches: Architecture, faith & revival* James Curl notes that Victorian churches in particular were “visible expressions of the presence and importance of religion at the time”.



Symbolism in Christian churches: A nave soars to the heavens, arched windows and columns are a strong structure but also soar heavenwards and let in the ‘Light of God’, - a spire points to heaven.



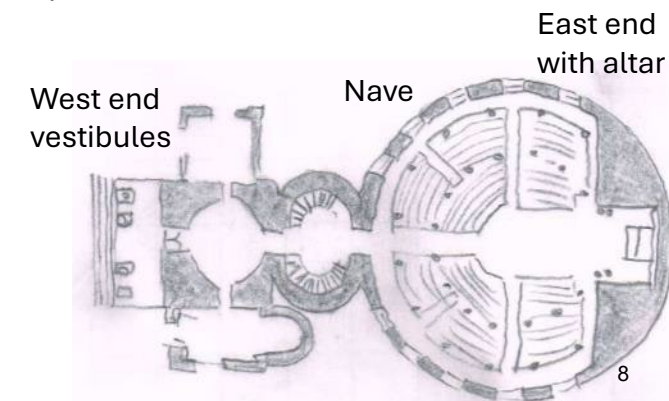
The plan and volumes of churches usually follow 19th Century Christian teaching, with a Chancel and Nave for the clergy and people respectively.



Larger buildings may follow this ‘Latin cross’ form with a transept creating the form of the cross, an important symbol of Christianity.

The overall form aims to create sightlines for the congregation to the altar, which sits before the East window - the East again having symbolic importance in Christianity.

Other forms and floorplans are used: St Chad’s Shrewsbury below (Grade I, George Steuart, 1792), follows an unusual circular plan:



Church building adaptive reuse – Function follows Form?

Adaptive reuse is about changing the function of a building, and potentially changing or adapting its form to suit the new use. But how easy is that for a building that was built for the primary purpose of worship? Several of the features that make a church suited to Christian worship explored on the previous page, make adaptation to some uses very difficult, although they are well suited to others.

- The large volume can be difficult to fill, and potentially inefficient
- A large volume is difficult to heat, roofs never insulated, feature-rich walls don't lend themselves to insulation
- Stained glass windows don't suit light needs of other types of building
- Towers and spires are expensive to maintain while providing little in terms of valuable floorspace
- Floor plan depth makes it difficult to get light into the centre of a subdivided space

While these issues all present challenges for developers that potentially make schemes less viable, they may be a positive benefit to arts, cultural and social uses. An important aspect of the Framework therefore is to be able to match the viable use to the form quickly so as not to waste effort on hopeless options.

Agreeing to sub-division of the open space of churches is challenging from a conservation perspective. Powell & De La Hey (1987) consider 'appropriate uses' to be ones which *"make it possible to retain the internal space of a church, along with some of its interesting features."*

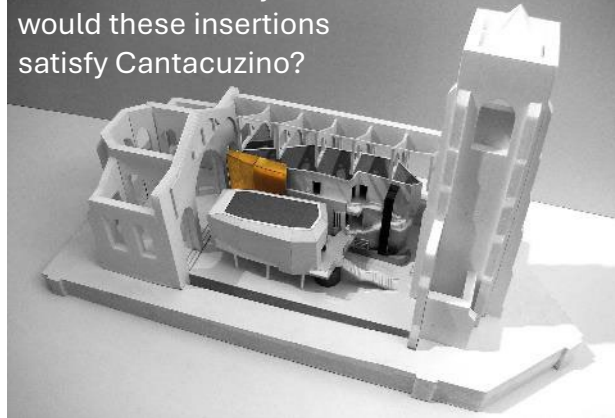
Cantacuzino has a similar view, saying that *"An appropriate new use is one that fits both the spirit and the form of the church. This means public or community use that maintains the single volume of the church, at least, in the case of mediaeval or Victorian Gothic churches, the single volume of the nave."* (Cantacuzino, 1989)

Installation, insertion and adaptation can all affect the space in such a way that it alters the building's fundamental relationship with its spiritual purpose.



Moving from the original open form left, through insertion, greater intervention through to horizontal subdivision – the impact of the volume is compromised.

All Souls Bolton by OMI –
would these insertions
satisfy Cantacuzino?



Are there any positives to this building type when considering adaptive reuse?!

Character features can be exploited
Quality of materials likely to be high
Heritage carries a premium in many uses
Acoustics can be good, suiting some uses
Large amounts of light if there are clear windows
Former churches have high social capital – saving them is worth doing for wider social benefit

Precedents - introduction

This precedent study will look at a number of adaptations of churches and places of worship, looking at the breadth of different approaches but also in order to see whether there are any common themes and how those are linked to the types of use.

The precedents are considered by use type as follows:

- Commercial
- Residential
- Social and community
- Retaining worship space alongside new uses



Monastery Serve di Maria Addolorata, Arco, Italy
Former monastery converted into a hotel by architects NOA
<https://www.dezeen.com/2021/08/05/monastero-arx-vivendi-hotel-spa-lake-garda-noa/>

Precedents - commercial



*De Petrus, Vught, Molenaar & Bol
& van Dillen Architects
Multiple community and
commercial uses*

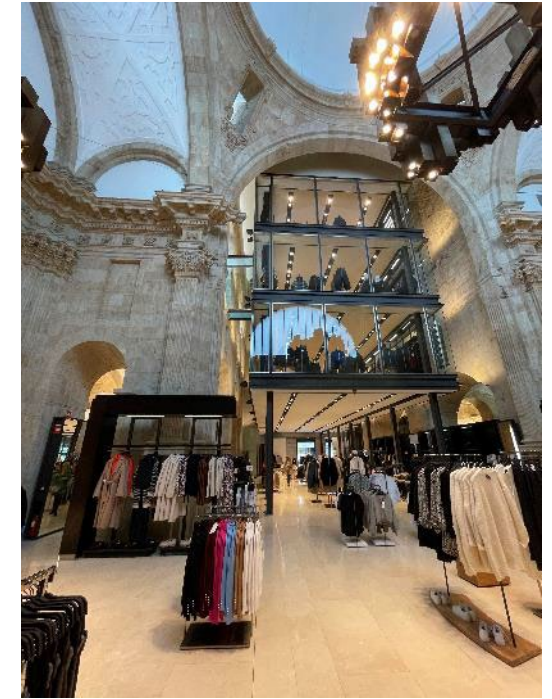


This very large church in Vught, Belgium, completed in 1884 by German architect Carl Weber, was saved and repurposed by a group of local entrepreneurs with the insertion of a sinuous mezzanine to create additional floorspace, and a complementary mix of five uses, including a library and bookstore. Repairs to the building had been funded by a grant from the municipality which enabled the adaptive reuse. A new entrance pierces the structure with the same design language as the mezzanine.

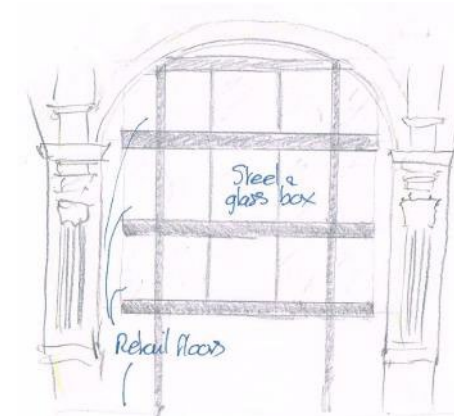


*St Thomas', Southwark, Alford Hall Monaghan Morris
Single office*

St Thomas' (by Thomas Cartwright, 1703) was turned into an office for developer Cathedral Group with minimal intervention – simply the insertion of furniture and upgrading of services. A glass balustrade has been added to the balcony for compliance with building regulations requirements. Meeting rooms were put in the crypt.



*San Antonio el Real, Duccio Grassi Architects
Zara store, Salamanca - Retail*

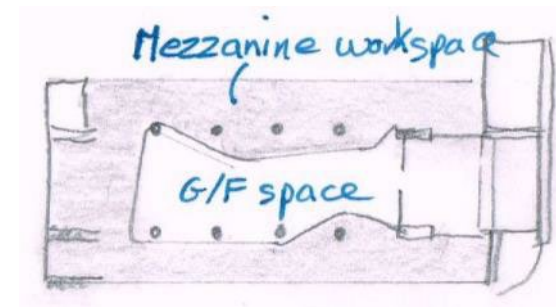


Dramatic additional floorspace is achieved with the insertion of a steel and glass box supported by narrow columns and not otherwise touching the former monastery.

Precedents - commercial



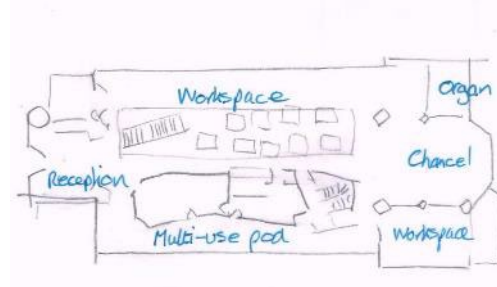
*Vetus + Novum, London, Trehearne Architects
Shared workspace (under development)*



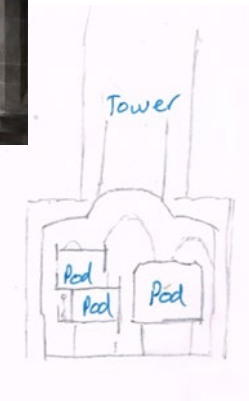
Grade I listed St Michael & All Angels, Shoreditch, completed 1864 by James Brooks. Converted into workspace in 2023 by the insertion of a mezzanine, wrapping round the arches.



*All Souls, Bolton, OMI Architects
Multiple community and commercial uses*



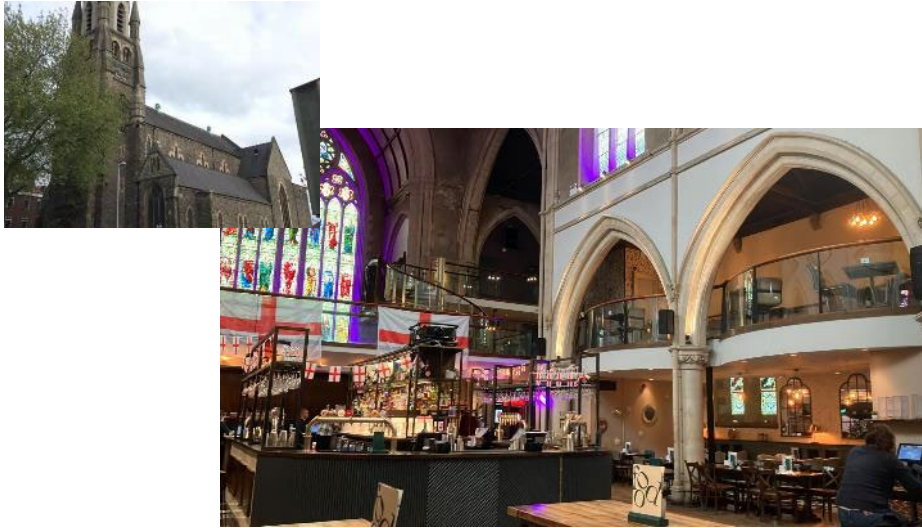
This is the principal precedent for the insertion of pods into a CofE church. This development was undertaken by the Churches Conservation Trust with the aid of a £5m HLF grant. The pods overcome or respond to the wide, open nature of the church which was by Paley & Austin, 1881.



*Selexyz Dominicanen, Merckx+Girod Architects
Bookstore*

This 13th Century Dominican church in Maastricht, Holland was repurposed by the insertion of a large and dramatic bookstore comprising a black steel structure into the nave, with little impact on the historic fabric or detracting from the original space.

Precedents - commercial



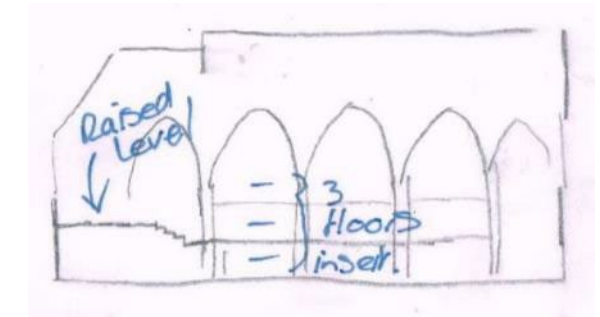
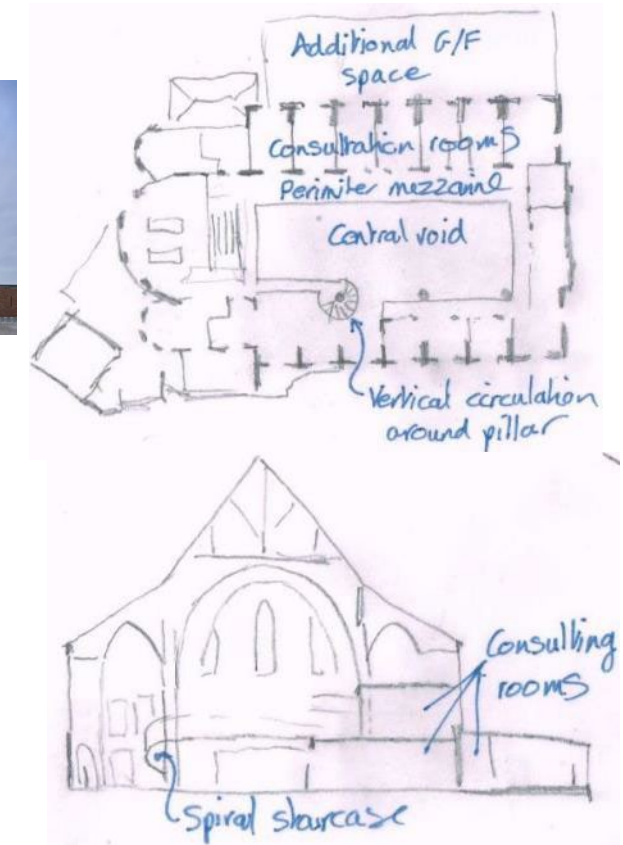
Unitarian Church, Nottingham, 1876 architect unknown
BGW Design Studio
Converted into bar/restaurant

Mezzanine levels have been inserted in the side aisles and east end, retaining central open space, providing additional floorspace with modest impact on the main volume of the church.



St Theresa's, Borne, The Netherlands
Reitsema & Partners Architects
Healthcare centre

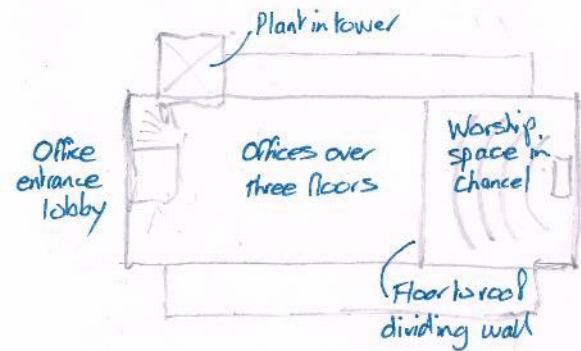
Mezzanine used again to provide additional floorspace for multiple small consulting rooms all accessed off open central space.



Precedents - commercial



Christ Church Oldbury
1841 architect unknown
Offices



Offices completely fill half the church laid out over four floors. The tower is used for plant and circulation. Development was done by the Diocese of Birmingham to generate income to keep the church open.



St Matthew Duddeston
184 by William Thomas
Offices

Another scheme by the same Diocese where a church was subdivided and 50% converted to offices over multiple floors, with access and vertical circulation via the tower.

A new insertion of a low level link building between the retained worship space and church hall provides a new access for the worship uses



Summary – Commercial Precedents

There are generally three ways in which churches are being adapted for commercial / office uses. In smaller buildings a single office can be created with minimal intervention, as at St Thomas Southwark, or larger insertions can be made into larger building such as in the extreme case of All Souls' Bolton.

The use of a mezzanine running round the sides is a common technique, especially as it retains the central open space. This can increase the floorspace by up to 50%.

Finally, there are these examples of subdivision with multiple floors which completely lose the spatial character of the section of the church converted.

Precedents – residential (UK)



*The Chapel,
Manchester, 1839
by Sir Charles Barry
Grade II**



Empty derelict shell filled with six floors of student accommodation in a scheme by Latham Architects (planning) and Buttress Architects (delivery).

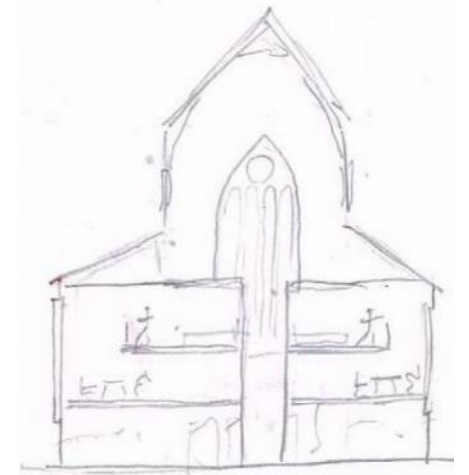


Waterpark Hall, United Reform Church

Intensive residential conversion of the church itself, surrounded by new mews houses



*St Mary's Hulme, Atelier MB
Residential townhouse 'pods'*



Manchester-based Atelier MB is pioneering the insertion of residential pods inside naves, following the rhythm of the columns and windows. Each unit is discrete, with circulation down the centre. Although substantially filled, the internal volume of the church can still be read.



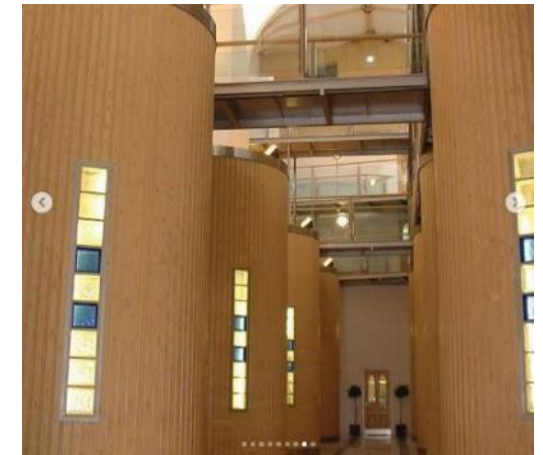
All Hallows, High Hoyland

Conversion of small churches and chapels into single dwellings is relatively common throughout Europe. Such schemes can often be done by a private individual.



St James' Edgbaston, 1851 by Samuel Sanders Tuelon

Multi-apartment conversion with complete subdivision by floors by Free Associates



*St George's, Hulme, Atelier MB
25 apartments, again in pods*

Precedents – residential (UK)



Holy Trinity, Bolton, 1825 by William Hardwick

Conversion to apartments by Makin Architecture with an extension built on the end (heavily value-engineered from architects' vision)



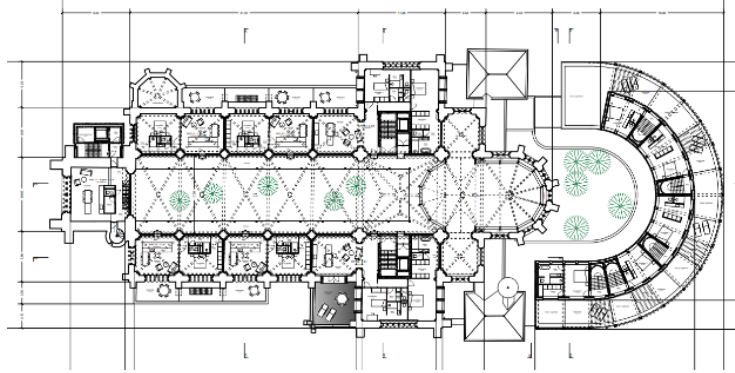
*St Paul's Denholme (left)
Methodist Chapel, Old Town (above)
Unknown original architects*

Two projects by Hawdown Russell Architects where they have cut away sections of the roof in order to create internal 'outside' spaces. Note also the Chapel's roof replaced with solar panels.

Precedents – residential (non-UK)



St Hubert, Watermael-Boitsfort
Hybrid plan in planning for mixed use conversion including worship space and 41 apartments



Scheme adds an extension with basement parking to the east end, fills the aisles and roofspace with apartments, and puts a lift up the outside of the tower



L'Eglise Saint Joseph, Parvis Chantecler, Brussels
Conversion and extension into 14 apartments
Of particular note here is the extension, and the balconies cut into the sides of the nave and roof



The Lucas, Boston
formerly the German Trinity Catholic Church
Luxury condominiums – steel structure inside old shell

Summary – Residential Precedents

As with the commercial / office precedents, there are generally three ways in which churches are being adapted for residential uses. Smaller churches and chapels can easily be converted into single dwellings with little intervention other than creating toilets and bathrooms.

The medium level of intervention is by the insertion of pods – complete residential units which are possible in larger churches with each pod taking light from a certain number of windows on the same side of the church, often symmetrically arranged.

Less common in England, but more common in the Low Countries and the United States, is completely conversion of the internal space with insertion of multiple floors. This is more likely in cities, where there is demand for apartments. There will not be much difference in design between residential, student or hotel uses.

“Lucas is a building that looks a little weird initially but turns out to be the product of common sense: preserving the shell of the church enriches the city with a memory of its past; preservation puts less pressure on the environment than you’d ever get from a conventional campaign of demolition and reconstruction; and Lucas isn’t afraid to look exactly like what it is. This is a confident, legible, individual chunk of architecture. By banging together two eras and two kinds of construction, it subtly celebrates the diversity of the neighborhood and the city.”

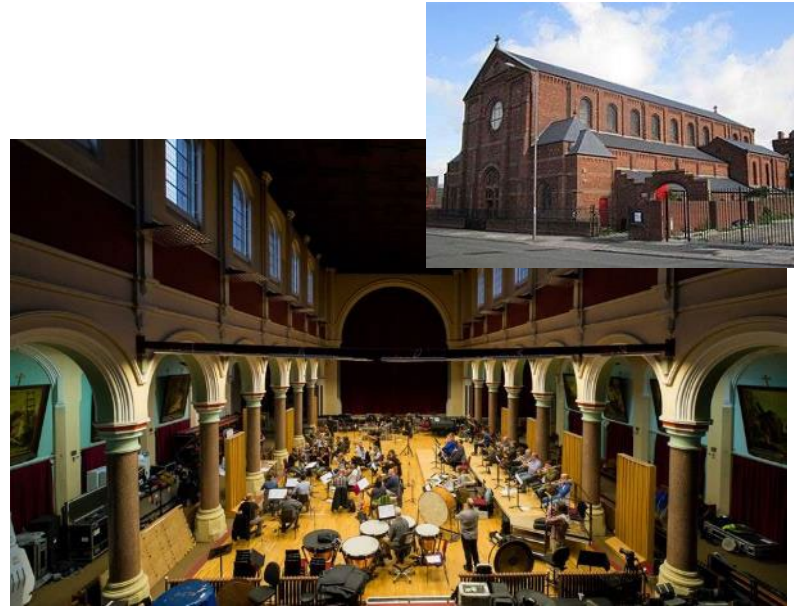
An Appraisal of Finegold Alexander’s Church-Turned-Condos. Architectural Record, March 2018

Precedents – social and community



St Paul's Bristol, 1794 by William Hague, Grade I

A flagship project by the Churches Conservation Trust, which raised £3.5m to restore this church in a highly deprived area of Bristol and turn it into a circus school called Circomedia. It is one of the best examples of regeneration using adaptive reuse of a church in England, along with All Souls Bolton.



St Mary of the Angels, Everton, 1910 by Pugin and Pugin in High Italian Renaissance style

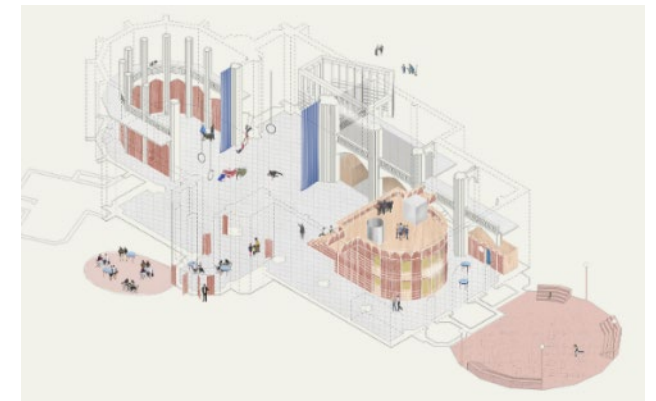
Very large Catholic church in Liverpool. Minimal intervention necessary to convert it into rehearsal space for the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Note though that those schemes needed substantial grant, they have created very high social impact.

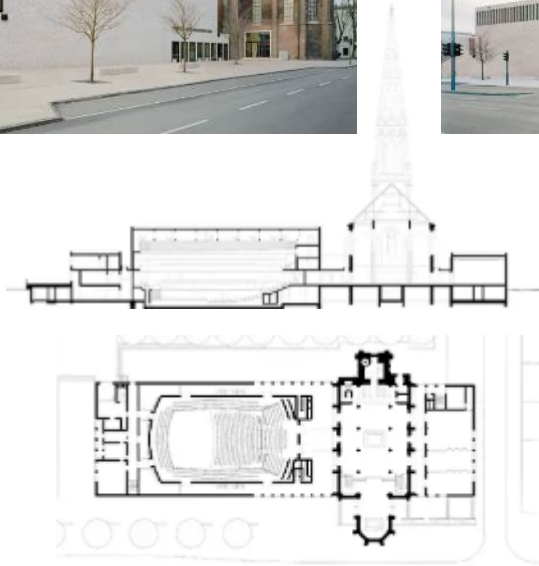


L'Eglise Performante, formerly St Francis Xavier, Anderlecht

Conversion into a library, circus school and café



Precedents – social and community



The Anneliese Brost Music Forum in Bochum, Germany is a concert hall which uses the church of St Marien as its central foyer, in between two new buildings 'inserted' either side. Designed by Bez + Kock Architekten. This is a different form of insertion – the church's interior is hardly changed, but the setting is dramatically changed with clear contrast between old and new.

Summary – Social and Community Precedents

Community, recreational, arts and sports uses can benefit from the large open space that a church provides, unlike commercial and residential uses for which large spaces can be difficult. Such projects are much more likely to need public / grant funding, but that is no different to funding of any other primarily social purpose.

These uses also have the benefit of retaining public access, which would be a consideration for planning authorities.

Skateparks and climbing centres are also good uses for churches with minimal and reversible insertion. This example is the church of Santa Barbara, Llanera, Asturia, Spain



Precedents – conversions retaining worship



All Saints', Bennington, medieval with Victorian restoration.



Rodney Melville & Partners conversion into 'The Beonna' a cultural events venue which can hold services, and weddings

St James, West Hampstead



This is the most comprehensive set of additional community uses for a Church of England church, including soft play centre, café, and Post Office.

Summary – Retention of Worship

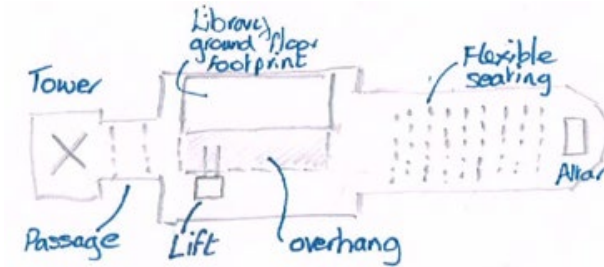
This is still relatively unusual. Two office uses have already been discussed where churches in the Midlands have been vertically subdivided with worship retained at the Chancel end.

There is increasing interest in keeping churches open by increasing their use at other times and introducing commercial uses. St James West Hampstead is the best example of this.

The conversion of Saint Hubert Watermael-Boitsfort in Belgium is including worship space alongside residential use.



St Marien, Munchenberg, Klaus Block
Insertion of library in active church



Church buildings – degrees of adaptation

Although a traffic light system has been adopted that doesn't mean high impact is 'bad' per se. High impact may be the only way to ensure economic sustainability. In most circumstances higher impacts will meet higher regulatory hurdles and be more expensive to deliver.



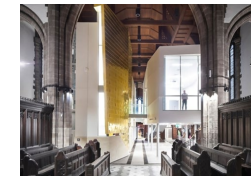
- High impact on building
 - Intervention
 - Insertion of complete floors
 - Removal of roof or other principal elevation
 - Extension with loss of fabric
 - Insertion
 - Insertion of Mezzanine floor
 - Extensive insertion of pods
 - Installation
 - Extension without fabric loss
 - Single pod
 - Movable furnishings



The Lucas, Boston



Holy Trinity, Bolton



All Souls ,Bolton



Anneliese Brost Music Forum, Bochum



St Thomas', Southwark



Unitarian Chapel, Manchester



St Theresa, Borne



St Mary, Hulme



Selexyz Dominicanen

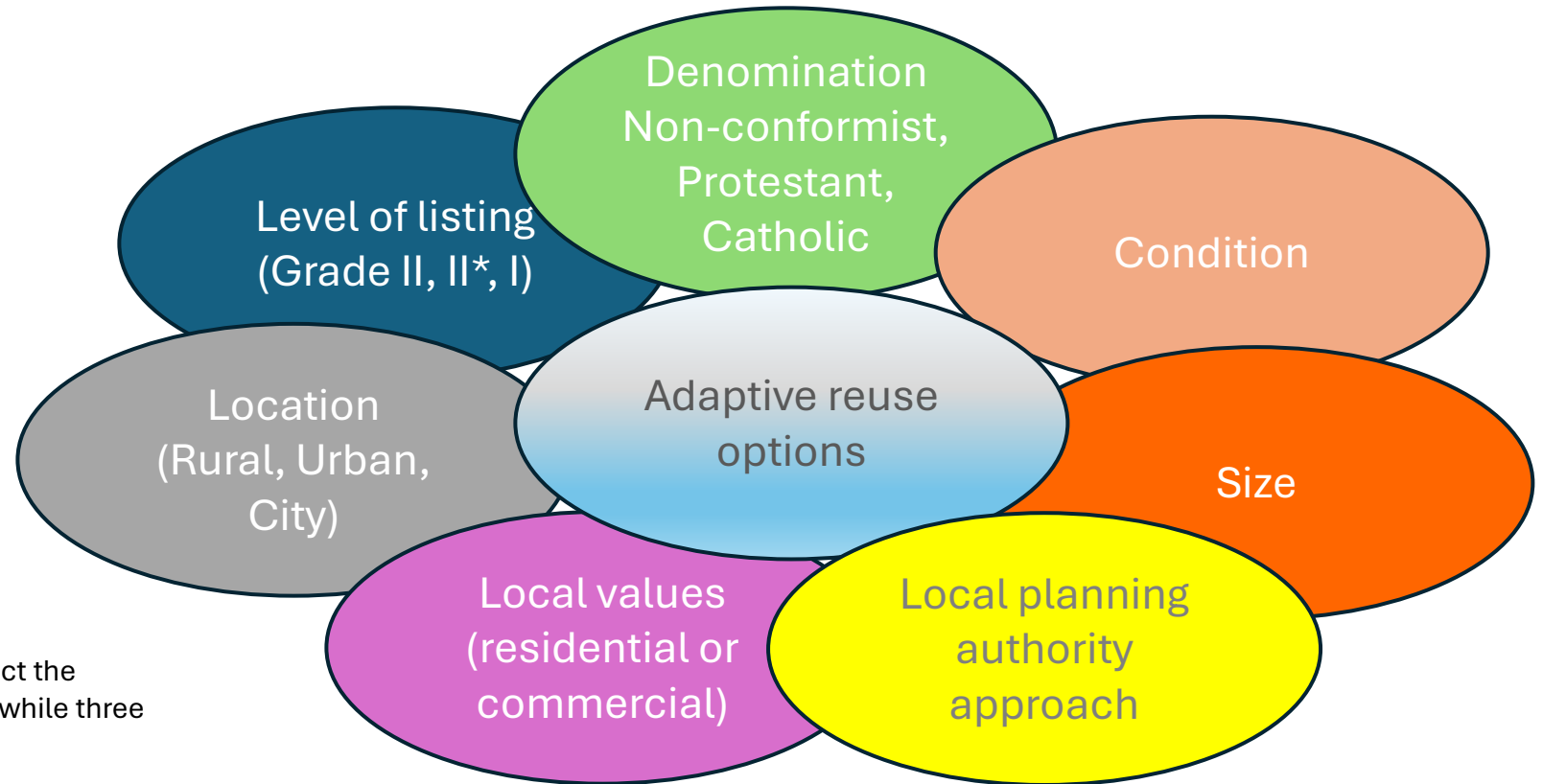
Church building adaptation – key drivers

There are a number of characteristics of a church building which affect which adaptation strategy might be used for its reuse, and which will form the basis for the Framework.

This graphic sets out those factors which, from precedent analysis, my dissertation, and my general experience of being a property developer in this field, affect the strategy for adaptive reuse. These will then each be considered more fully on subsequent pages in order to justify their inclusion in the Framework.

As will be shown later, four of these factors affect the architectural adaptation strategy and typology, while three of them just affect the possible use class.

Each of these key drivers will now be analysed to understand what effect they have either on possible uses, typologies and viability of a particular church.



The first iteration of this analysis only had six of these factors – the ones which are objective and defineable. However from experience I realised that sometimes however good a proposal, a planning application is always at the mercy of individuals interpreting policy, and then planning committee members voting how they see fit. Hence the seventh key driver was added.

Church building adaptation drivers

Level of listing
(Grade II, II*, I)

Background

Historic England (historicengland.org.uk) defines the three levels of listing as follows:

- Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest. Only around 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I
- Grade II* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest. Around 5.8% of listed buildings are Grade II*
- Grade II buildings are of special interest. Around 91.7% of all listed buildings are in this class and it is the most likely grade of listing for a homeowner

The level of listing is important in the consideration of planning and listed building consent applications. Applications involving Grade II listed buildings will be decided by the Local Planning Authority with advice from its Conservation Officer. Applications involving buildings graded II* or I are referred to Historic England as a statutory consultee.

Implications for adaptive reuse

The level of listing drives the degree to which the planning and heritage protection regimes will allow adaptive reuse. Generally speaking, the higher the level of listing, the less adaptation will be permitted. This therefore limits the adaptive reuse options. Central to the any listed building application is an assessment of **significance** which will vary from building to building. The significance of the building, features of the building or even its setting will influence its level of listing, but also the permissible approach to adaptive reuse.

Grade I

With minimal adaptation possible uses are likely to be those which benefit from the original form of the church, particularly its height and volume. As such uses are usually non-commercial, and grant funding may be needed. Social value can remain high.

Grade II*

Such buildings fall somewhere between the two, depending on the reason why the II* listing has been allocated. For instance, the church may be an important example of a particular architect's work or contain some particularly important design feature.

Grade II

Harm to a Grade II listed building needs to be justified but a broad range of possibilities ought to be available to such a building.

Unlisted

Some churches are unlisted and as such would not be subject to listed building restrictions. Retention of the building could be on sustainability or economic grounds. Demolition could also be a possible outcome.

Church building adaptation drivers

Condition

Background

As was explained in my Dissertation, there is a huge issue with the state of repair of closed churches in England, because of the length of time that elapses between the time when it is first known that a church will close, and when it is finally available for adaptive reuse. This period, which can range from 5 to 20 years, is a period where little if any maintenance will be done.

Peter Aiers, formerly Chief Executive of the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) noted from his experience with the churches vested in the CCT, *“the starting point is you never have an asset in great condition. Immediately you start you are undoing 20 years of neglect”*. (Dissertation interview, April 2025)



St John's Hanley on acquisition by Church Converts in 2008. It had been closed for 24 years.



Implications for adaptive reuse

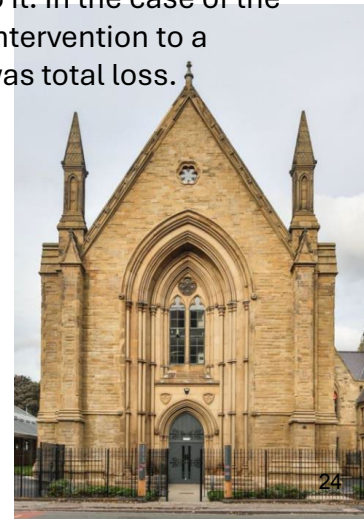
The worse the condition of the building the greater the cost of getting the church back to a condition to form a basis for a sustainable adaptive reuse.

Planning law recognises the concept of 'conservation deficit', the amount by which a building's end value is less than the cost of getting it there. 'Enabling development' which is development that would not otherwise be permissible, may be allowed to overcome conservation deficit but this is a very complex planning argument to pursue. Conservation deficit can also be overcome with grant funding. For instance, OMI's scheme at All Souls Bolton was enabled by £5m of HLF grant and would not have been viable without it.

The only positive aspect of a building being in poor condition, particularly if the building is not too highly listed, is that there will be benefit to rescuing the building, and this public benefit is going to outweigh any remaining harm that could be done to it. In the case of the Unitarian Chapel on Upper Brook Street (below), an extreme level of intervention to a Grade II* listed building was permitted because the only alternative was total loss.



Unitarian Chapel, Upper Brook Street, Manchester
Before development and with adaptive reuse nearing completion



Church building adaptation drivers

Local planning
authority
approach

Background

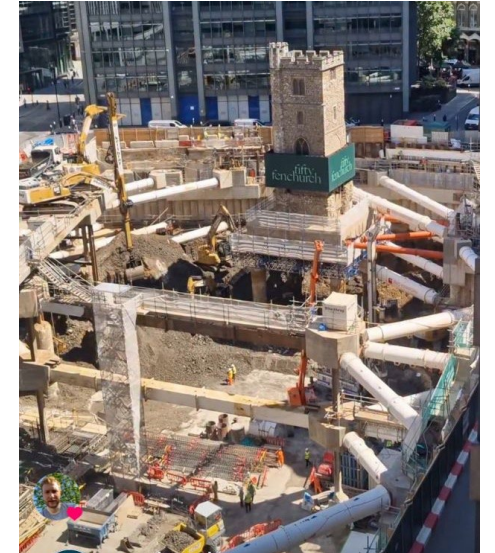
Adaptive reuse of any building needs a planning application, and if the building is listed, which most churches are, it also needs a listed building application. These are decided by the Local Planning Authority following the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and any other relevant local policies and guidance.

Planning officers and planning committees rely on the advice and expertise of their Conservation Officer, although in many cases this role is outsourced to consultancy firms. As was explained in my Dissertation, the quality of conservation advice is extremely variable. At one extreme would be a well-trained pragmatic officer employed by a pro-regeneration council (e.g. Birmingham), while at the other extreme would be a consultant with an archaeology background with no church experience.

The lack of experience of conservation officers in dealing with church buildings is in large part due to the Ecclesiastical Exemption, by which the Church of England does not need to seek planning permission to make changes, deferring instead to their own Diocesan Advisory Committees (DACs). This means that the first time a conservation officer will get to consider a church building is when an application for a closed one comes before them, potentially with a scheme that has a high degree of intervention because of a poor state of repair.

Implications for adaptive reuse

An architecturally sound and commercially viable proposal for adaptive reuse can fail because a planning committee takes the advice of a cautious conservation officer. This is potentially on a matter of opinion and interpretation. Architects will usually know the planning team in their local authority, and this is a good reason for clients appointing local practices.



How many conservation officers would support this?



St Elisabeth Eastbourne (Grade II), 1935 by D Stonham and Son - by the time the local planning authority granted consent for residential development, the building had deteriorated beyond the point of no return. Revised schemes were turned down, and it was finally demolished in 2020.

Church building adaptation drivers

Denomination
Protestant,
Catholic,
Non-conformist

Background

It was noted in the earlier analysis that adaptive reuse of churches is uncommon in the largely Catholic churches of Southern Europe, while the predominantly Protestant Northern European countries such as the Netherlands and United Kingdom are well advanced.

This is not however as a result of Catholic churches being less adaptable, but because the Catholic Church has been slower to close churches, despite facing similar challenges to the Protestant denominations.

In England, the Catholic Dioceses have taken the position that they would rather a building was demolished than reused for a 'profane purpose', with that meaning anything other than worship. However this would not ultimately be for them to decide as the closed building will fall under the jurisdiction of the planning system.

In the United States on the other hand, Catholic Dioceses have led the way in closure, particularly in the eastern seaboard cities, rocked by sexual abuse scandals. The picture right is a condominium scheme proposed for a Catholic church in Boston.



Implications for adaptive reuse

The denomination of the church only really affects adaptive reuse in terms of how adaptable the interior is, with different denominations differing in terms of emphasis on use of spaces, decoration, iconography etc. This will in turn affect how the internal spaces are used, but ultimately the differences are not that great.

Protestant

In a protestant church, the Chancel is considered the most sacred part and likely to be most decorated and less adaptable; the pulpit will also be prominent. The benefit for adaptive reuse is that other parts of the building will be relatively much more plain.

Non-conformist

Such buildings tend to be least decorated, as the emphasis is on preaching. There may not be an altar or chancel. A feature of such churches that causes an issue for adaptive reuse is that they often have large stepped balconies such as with the Bethesda Chapel in Stoke on Trent (right), which has been a problem building for many years.

Catholic

A Catholic church will be characterised by more statuary, iconography, side chapels, and richer decoration, which may make higher levels of adaptation more difficult. However Catholic churches tend to lack the stained glass that can be an issue in the reuse of Protestant churches.



Church building adaptation drivers

Background

There is no 'standard' size of a church. They are built with some regard to the size of the population expected to worship there but with exceptions. In some places churches are larger than they might logically be because some sort of statement was being made by its builder or funder, such as the 'wool churches' of the Cotswolds and Norfolk the scale of which was a visible expression of the wealth derived from the medieval wool trade.

Trevor Cooper, writing as Chair of the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance, talks of the competitive over-building of Protestant churches by the Victorians, at a time when congregations had already started to fall.



Happisburgh parish church, a large 'wool church' now serving a population of just 1,400

Size

Implications for adaptive reuse

Supply of buildings in poor condition

The 'competitive overbuilding' of Victorian churches has given rise to large churches becoming redundant in urban areas. This is not an issue for adaptive reuse per se, but does increase the supply of such buildings. More of an issue potentially is that many Victorian churches, and their roofs in particular, are coming to the end of their design lives, thus increasing the cost of adaptation and reducing the viable options.

Need for scale

Some commercial uses need scale in order for them to have a market. Student accommodation for instance is not institutionally fundable below about 100 units.

Too big for location

A church that was oversized for whatever reason presents a challenge for finding any use in that settlement for a large building. They will be expensive to convert, expensive to look after, and may need a lot of footfall to make any use viable.

Towers and spires

Towers and spires can be difficult to find uses for and can just be a burden as they are extremely expensive to maintain. Just scaffolding a spire for repairs could cost £100,000.

Mixed use

Large urban churches in good condition could provide opportunities for multiple mixed uses which could aid viability and spread risk. A good example is De Petrus Vught (page 11)

Church building adaptation drivers

Location
(Rural, Urban,
City)

Background

As explained in my Dissertation, there isn't a strong correlation between location and likelihood of closure for churches in England. The issues in rural and urban areas are different. Rural areas have seen a flight of population, leading to the problem of large medieval churches falling into disuse as congregations get smaller and older.

In urban areas, the issue is more usually the redundancy of Victorian church buildings, stemming from competitive overbuilding of Protestant churches in Victorian times, and Victorian churches built in areas of urban expansion in cities which now find themselves in low value locations or in Muslim areas of former industrial cities.



St Mary Kenderchurch, Hereford.
Redundant due to remoteness



St John Coleford, Forest of Dean
A Victorian church now too big for the town

Implications for adaptive reuse

The principal implication on adaptive reuse is what use is most likely to succeed. "Location, location, location" is a mantra in the property world referring to the importance of this factor in determining success of a property venture or a property's value. Churches in rural areas are likely to have a smaller range of uses because of the lack of footfall. Within urban areas, specific location becomes critical, as different areas of cities are often characterised by surrounding uses.

Sometimes the possible use for a church may be driven by planning guidance, although this is unlikely. Equally the planning system does not act as a judge of whether or not a proposed conversion is a good idea or not. Adaptive reuse of a heritage asset may be viewed as having a positive regeneration impact, as was the case for the German Trinity Catholic Church in Boston when it was converted into condominiums (see following page).



St John's Bollington – is there demand for 18 small flats in a Cheshire village?



St Paul's Denholme– will anyone pay £1.4m to live here, in a building this big?

Church building adaptation drivers

Local values
(residential or
commercial)

Background

Property values vary across the country. It is a relatively well known fact that property values are higher in the South East of England and lower in the North. There are exceptions to that, e.g. seaside towns in Kent, or spa towns such as Harrogate in Yorkshire, but the same size property can have a different value in different parts of Britain by a factor of 10.

Commercial property values vary considerably as well, with higher values achievable in areas with strong transport and distribution links, and skilled workforces.

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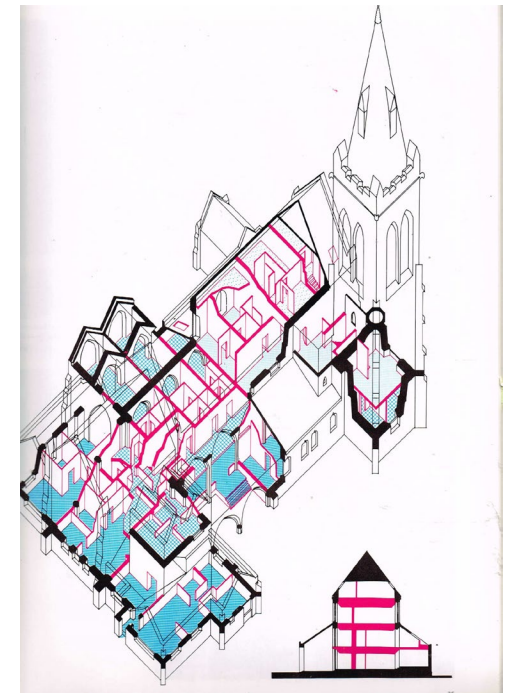
Implications for adaptive reuse

Property values only have implications for the creation of residential or commercial accommodation. Higher values generate more profit per m² which either enables more repair to be achieved, more to be paid for the church in the first place, or more profit for the developer. It might also allow a lower level of intervention to save a church building. Generally more options will be viable if local values are high.

At the other extreme, social housing has very low monetary value (but high social value) and can generally not be delivered without grant. There is only one example of a church in England converted to social housing and that was one in Harrogate converted in the 1980s (right). Although it started as 'affordable', all these apartments are now in private ownership.

Providing affordable housing is however in line with the Church's mission so if a way can be found of funding it, social housing could be a very appropriate option if other characteristics of the building support it.

(Drawing from *Churches: A question of Conversion*. Ken Powell & Celia De La Hey. SAVE 1987)



Church building adaptation – summary of key drivers

In summary therefore, there are seven key characteristics of a church building which affect which adaptation strategy might be used for its reuse, and which will form the basis for the Framework.



Christchurch Greyfriars, City of London
Converted into a 12-storey single dwelling by Wignall & Moore

Characteristic	Primarily affects	Reasoning
Level of listing	Typology	The higher the level of listing, the more significant the building is in its current form, and the less likely it is that adaptation will be possible. Installation may be the only option for a Grade I listed building
Condition	Typology	A key economic driver as development will not only need to be economically sustainable in itself, but will need to overcome exceptional costs
Planners	Typology	Support of planning officers will be needed for higher levels of adaptation, and some adopt a much more conservative approach than others. Local architects should know this.
Denomination	Typology	Catholic churches tend to be less adaptable just because their internal significance is higher - they feel more 'sacred'. Non-conformist chapels with balconies can be particularly difficult to adapt.
Size	Use	This can work both ways - for instance in a low value rural area a small building is easier to deal with, whereas in an inner city area commercial use, scale may be needed for viability
Location	Use	Location affects use although it does not necessarily affect the degree of intervention
Local values	Use	Local monetary values affect use because if they are not high enough commercial and residential projects will not be viable.

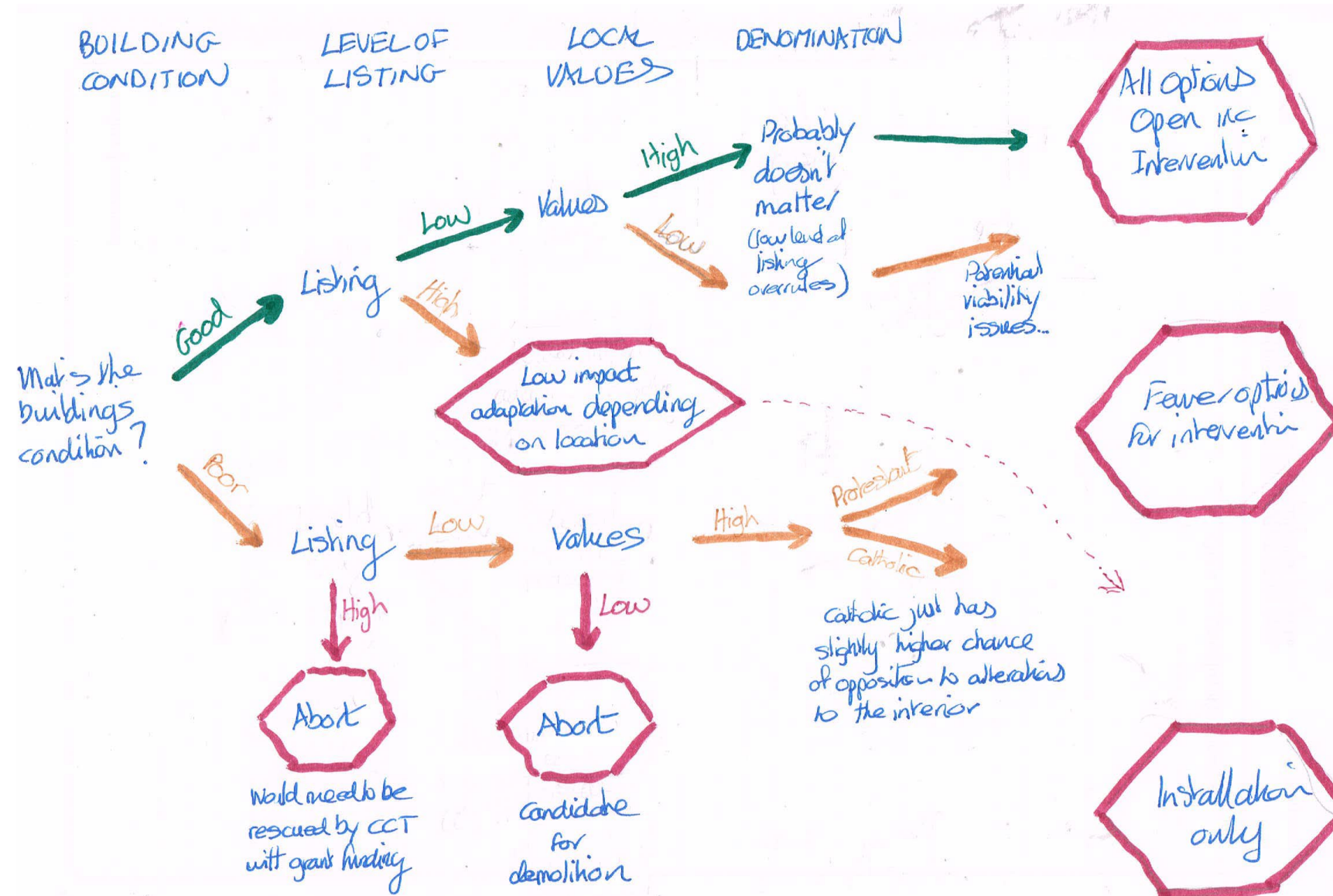
Framework – introduction

In pursuing this work, I am looking to develop a Framework that will enable stakeholders to identify likely successful adaptive reuse strategies quickly and effectively, thus reducing the amount of time closed or closing churches spend in a state of uncertainty, reducing wasted costs and time.

Some outcomes for particular types of church and typology are easy to predict, e.g. the small church in a rural location in reasonable condition or which the most likely outcome is a private residence, or the medium size Grade II listed church in the middle of a city shopping centre that can be a restaurant.

My first attempt at the Framework was in the form of the decision tree shown here, which follows the developer thought process. For instance, following the top line - church in good condition, low level of listing, decent local values, CofE – all options are open and residential will probably work.

At the other end of the scale following the bottom path - church in poor condition, Grade I listed – not a development project and would probably be vested in the Churches Conservation Trust.



Framework – introduction

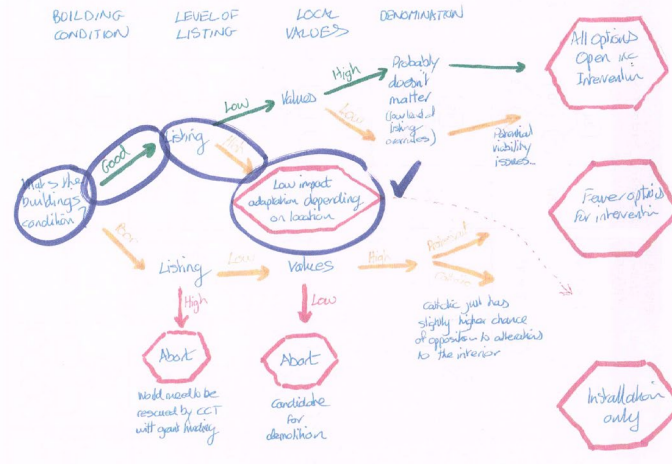
I tested this model against four of my projects and it gave reasonable results, however it was not perfect. Application of this decision tree to St John's Hanley would have been a warning and saved us a lot of pain and money! The Unitarian Chapel scheme worked because while the building was in poor condition, the condition was in fact so poor that an intensive residential scheme in a high value area was possible.

What also became clear from this was that in reality these factors cannot be considered in order or in isolation. All the different factors need to be considered together in order to make a decision, and a decision tree like this could not do that.

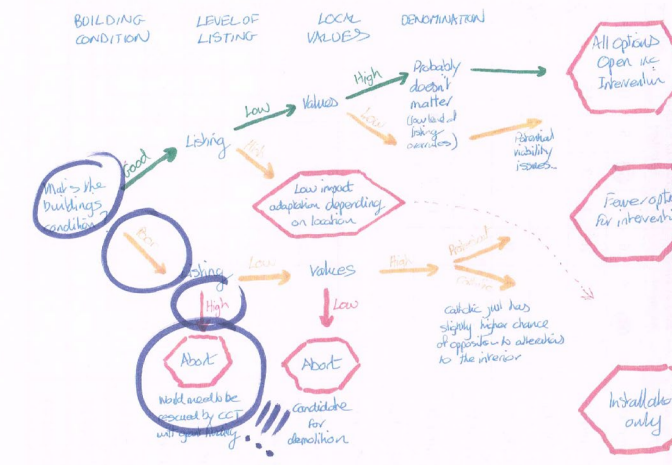
However, this also led to the thought that on the right hand 'outcome' side, there were perhaps a fixed number of possible outcomes which the Framework could steer towards – either to a single option, or a number of possible options in each case.

This therefore laid the foundations for the Framework.

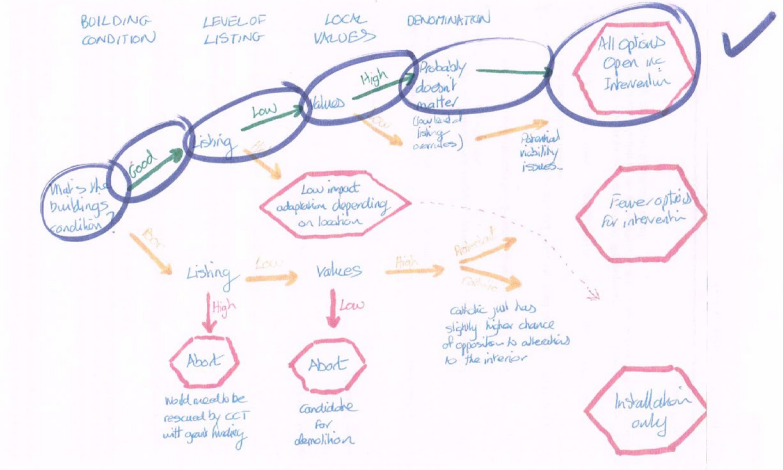
St Luke's Blakenhall Auction house then disposal as a place of worship



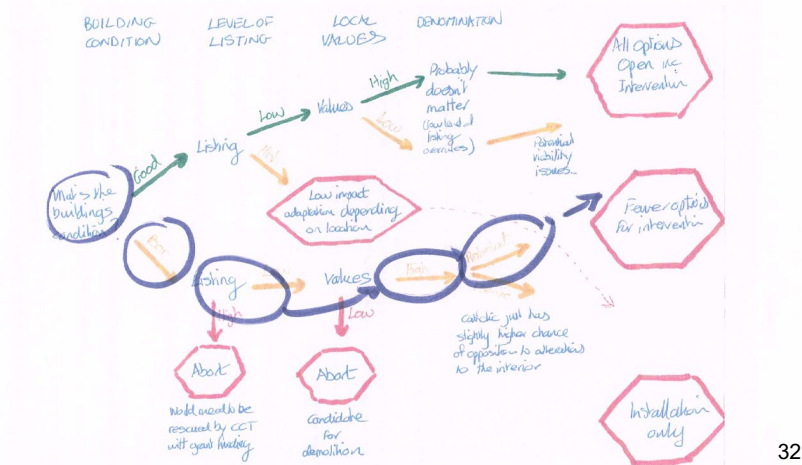
St John's Hanley Auction house then disposal as a community centre (with large development loss)



St James Castle Eden High value single private house



Unitarian Chapel, Manchester Student accommodation



Framework – end use and typology types

Considering that right hand ‘outcome’ idea, I have identified 12 outcomes, combining five principal use classes. These range from low impact installation with minimal impact on the fabric and readability of the volume, through to high impact intervention that causes high impact on the internal volume or external appearance.

Each use class has been given a code
Each typology has been ascribed a letter

The Use Codes and Typologies are important as they will be combined to define 12 possible outcomes

Note that some options such as REC-C (Recreational use, high intervention) don’t exist because these use types don’t need a high level of intervention – rather they benefit from the open space.

The examples given of each use type are drawn from the precedent study. All the churches studied (in this and in my Dissertation and other work) fall into one of these outcomes, thus supporting this categorisation.

Use Code	Description	Typology	Description	Notes	Examples
RES	Residential, including hotels and student accommodation at Typology C	A	Single unit, single volume	May include discrete room pods	St James Castle Eden, All Hallows High Hoyland, St Paul's Denholme
		B	Multi unit podded	Pods retaining central aisle and reading of space	St Mary's Hulme, St George's Hulme
		C	Multi unit subdivided	Vertical and horizontal, filling the volume	Unitarian Chapel, Harrogate St Luke, Waterpark Hall URC, St James' Edgbaston, Holy Trinity Bolton, The Lucas Boston, Saint-Hubert Watermael-Boitsfort, L'Eglise Saint Joseph, Parvis Chantecler
CML	Commercial, including retail	A	Single office / user	Retains principal volume	St Thomas' Southwark, Zara Salamanca, Selexyz Dominicanen
		B	Multi tenant / user	Mezzanine or pods	Vetus & Novum Shoreditch, De Petrus Vught, All Souls Bolton, St Theresa Borne, St Matthew's Hull
		C	Subdivided	May not be total, but original single volume lost	Chrst Church Oldbury, St Matthew's Duddeston
REC	Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Arts	A	Single use, whole space	Circus, skatepark, Climbing centre, combination	Circomedia Bristol, The Mount Without Bristol, Kaos Temple Asturias
		B	Some insertion, mezzanine etc	Music/performance related uses	The Friary Everton, Anneliese Brost Music Forum Bochum, L'Eglise Performante Anderlecht
				Bars / restaurants	Pitcher & Piano Nottingham, Gattopardo Milan, The Jane Antwerp, Church Brew Works Pittsburgh
CTY	Community			Retreat / wellness	Repton Park Hospital, Westwood Retreat Centre
				Art gallery, museum	Nostra Signora della Costa Levante, Kiscelli Museum Budapest, Woods Cathedral Detroit
WOR	Worship	A	Single volume, potentially including worship		West Hampstead, St Laurence Reading
		B	Multi function		Not yet exploited (De Petrus Vught it worship retained)
WOR	Worship	A	Worship by another faith	or just different group of same faith	Haggia Sophia, St Thomas URC Watford
		B	Principally faith but adapted	Mutiple community use but primarily for worship	Ascension Church Southampton

Residential Outcomes

RES-A

Residential
Single unit, single volume
e.g. All Hallows
High Hoyland



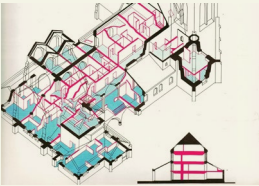
RES-B

Residential
Multi unit podded
e.g. St Mary's Hulme



RES-C

Residential
Multi unit subdivided
e.g. St Luke's Harrogate



Commercial Outcomes

CML-A

Commercial
Single office / user
e.g. Zara Salamanca



CML-B

Commercial
Multi tenant / user
e.g. St Matthew's Hull



CML-C

Commercial
Subdivided
e.g. St Matthew's
Duddeston



Recreational Outcomes

REC-A

Recreational
Single use, whole space
e.g. Circomedia Bristol



REC-B

Recreational
Some insertion
e.g. Pitcher & Piano,
Nottingham



Framework – end use and typology types - examples

Community Outcomes

CTY-A

Community use
Single volume, inc. worship
e.g. The Sherriff Centre,
West Hampstead



CTY-B

Community use
Multi-function
e.g. De Petrus Vught



Retained Worship Outcomes

WOR-A

Worship by another faith
e.g. Hagia Sophia



WOR-B

Worship with adaptation for ,
additional uses
e.g. Ascension Southampton



Framework – end use and typology types

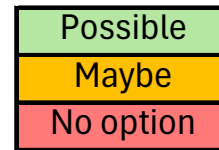
The full Framework is set out in detail on the following two pages. It takes the format shown here, but split into two pages. The first page is the four characteristics that affect the Typology for the adaptive reuse – Listing, Condition, Planners and Denomination. The second page presents the three further factors that affect the Use type, but not the typology – Size, Location, Values.

It should be used by considering each of the characteristics of the church building in turn and noting the use and typology types that are green and amber. Any use and typology types that are red should be discounted.

When all the results of all the different characteristics are amalgamated you will be left with the use types and typologies that can be considered for that church building, i.e. only those which are green or amber **across all characteristics**.

Note that the Outcome Ribbon becomes a key part of the Framework.

Characteristic
Range of options
Significance of the options
“Outcome Ribbon”
Traffic lights assessment of Typology and Use types
Commentary on resultant options



LISTING	Potential for high impact adaptation and use			LISTING
	GRADE I	GRADE II*	GRADE II	
CONDITION	High level of listing will greatly restrict the opportunities to make adaptations. Very high test of harm. Options limited to community, recreational and worship uses with little intervention	This is still regarded as highly listed, and a building of national importance for some specific reason. Options restricted but not as much as Grade I. More of the typology B options have been opened up. Typology C still extremely unlikely to be possible.	Higher degrees of intervention likely to be allowed because the harm threshold is lower. All options possible subject to other factors.	LISTING
	POOR	MEDIUM	GOOD	
PLANNERS	More difficult passage through planning process CAUTIOUS, CONSERVATION FOCUS Extreme protection of the building in its current form regardless of the need to save it with adaptive reuse. Only typology A will be acceptable, and maybe typology B.	Average planning and conservation officer may be overly cautious through lack of experience dealing with this building type. More work will be needed. Typologies A and B will be considered but Typology C will be very challenging	Proactive support from planners POSITIVE, PROACTIVE, REGENERATION FOCUSED A positive planning and conservation officer should support good proposals for adaptive reuse. All options possible subject to other factors, although all planning and conservation officers will be cognisant of the NPPF.	PLANNERS
	CATHOLIC/HIGH	CHURCH OF ENGLAND	NON-CONFORMIST	
DENOMINATION	Low impact adaptation and use The Catholic Church is more sensitive to adaptive reuse, and buildings. All typologies and end uses possible but may be subject to sensitivities over the sacred nature of the interior	The Church of England doesn't oppose any change of use in principle except conversion to non-Christian faiths and pure drinking establishments. WOR-A will be excluded if for non-Christian faith. REC-B restriction on drinking establishments only. Otherwise no restrictions.	Non conformist churches may have prominent balconies and features that make high levels of intervention difficult to achieve. Typologies B and C may not be possible with balconied interiors. Otherwise no restrictions.	DENOMINATION
	LARGE	AVERAGE	SMALL	
LOCATION	Small population density RURAL Rural areas do not suit uses which require a high footfall or levels of economic activity. Small scale residential uses most likely. A business wanting a small office may be possible.	High population density URBAN Church building in urban areas are likely to support a variety of uses. Shared workspace in urban areas for homeworkers is a trend so demand could be tested.	Intimate uses CITY Cities provide all options for use types. All uses possible, although single dwelling and single office are less likely uses of the space.	LOCATION
	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	
VALUES	Lower viability of commercial and residential schemes Low property values will generate very little margin to overcome exceptional costs of dealing with a church building. Only typology A will be acceptable, and maybe typology B	Better viability of commercial and residential schemes High local values will lead to a much higher possible margin from a scheme, but will also drive a higher initial land value. Typologies A and B will be considered but Typology C will be very challenging.	High local values will lead to a much higher possible margin from a scheme, but will also drive a higher initial land value. All options possible subject to other factors, although all planning and conservation officers will be cognisant of the NPPF.	VALUES
	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	

Factors affecting typology

Factors affecting use type

Framework for adaptive reuse of church buildings

L I S T I N G	Low impact adaptation and use												Potential for high impact adaptation and use												L I S T I N G												
	GRADE I												GRADE II*													GRADE II											
	High level of listing will greatly restrict the opportunities to make adaptations. Very high test of harm.												This is still regarded as highly listed, and a building of national importance for some specific reason. Options restricted but not as much as Grade I.													Higher degrees of intervention likely to be allowed because the harm threshold is lower.											
	Options limited to community, recreational and worship uses with little intervention												More of the typology B options have been opened up. Typology C still extremely unlikely to be possible.													All options possible subject to other factors.											
RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B													
C O N D I T I O N	High cost barrier												Low financial hurdle												L I S T I N G												
	POOR												MEDIUM													GOOD											
	If the building is in poor condition, either a very high level of intervention will be necessary for a viable project, or grant funding will be needed to meet any shortfall.												Most church buildings will be in this middle area due lack of maintenance in the use seeking period, with the roof and damp issues being of particular concern.													If the building is in good condition there are no particular financial barriers to adaptive reuse											
	Most options open but made more difficult by high need for intervention and/or funding. Grant less likely for RES and CML uses hence no RES-A or CML-A												Typology A options have been opened up if less funding is needed. All typology B and C options likely to be possible.													All options possible subject to other factors.											
RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B													
P L A N N E R S	More difficult passage through planning process												Proactive support from planners												P L A N N E R S												
	CAUTIOUS, CONSERVATION FOCUS												AVERAGE													POSITIVE, PROACTIVE, REGENERATION FOCUSED											
	Extreme protection of the building in its current form regardless of the need to save it with adaptive reuse.												An average planning and conservation officer may be overly cautious through lack of experience dealing with this building type. More work will be needed.													A positive planning and conservation officer should support good proposals for adaptive reuse.											
	Only typology A will be acceptable, and maybe typology B.												Typologies A and B will be considered but Typology C will be very challenging													All options possible subject to other factors, although all planning and conservation officers will be cogniscent of the NPPF.											
RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B													
D E N O M I N A T I O N	Low impact adaptation and use												Potential for high impact adaptation and use												D E N O M I N A T I O N												
	CATHOLIC/HIGH												CHURCH OF ENGLAND													NON-CONFORMIST											
	The Catholic Church is more sensitive to adaptive reuse, and buildings.												The Church of England doesn't oppose any change of use in principle except conversion to non-Christian faiths and pure drinking establishments.													Non conformist churches may have prominent balconies and features that make high levels of intervention difficult to achieve.											
	All typologoes and end uses possible but may be subject to sensitivities over the sacred nature of the interior												WOR-A will be excluded if for non-Christian faith. REC-B restriction on drinking establishments only. Otherwise no restrictions.													Typologies B and C may not be possible with balconied interiors. Otherwise no restrictions.											
RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B												RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B													

Part 1 – characteristics affecting typology

Framework for adaptive reuse of church buildings

S I Z E	Uses which need a lot of space ← Intimate uses → LARGE Very large buildings give scope for lots of floorspace but are too large for more intimate uses. RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B Large buildings too large for Typology A, and may be too large for Typology B to be sustainable.	AVERAGE RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B Typology A may be possible in certain locations, and works for REC uses.	SMALL A small church may not be big enough for certain uses to be viable. RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B Typology A favoured, Typology B may be possible depending on the size. New church groups tend to want larger buildings hence cautious on WOR.	S I Z E
	Small population density ← High population density → RURAL Rural areas do not suit uses which require a high footfall or levels of economic activity. RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B Small scale residential uses most likely. A business wanting a small office may be possible.	URBAN Church building in urban areas are likely to support a variety of uses. RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B Shared workspace in urban areas for homeworkers is a trend so demand could be tested.	CITY Cities provide all options for use types. RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B All uses possible, although single dwelling and single office are less likely uses of the space.	
	Lower viability of commercial and residential schemes ← Better viability of commercial and residential schemes → LOW Low property values will generate very little margin to overcome exceptional costs of dealing with a church building. RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B Only typology A will be acceptable, and maybe typology B	MEDIUM RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B Typologies A and B will be considered but Typology C will be very challenging.	HIGH High local values will lead to a much higher possible margin from a scheme, but will also drive a higher initial land value. RES-A RES-B RES-C CML-A CML-B CML-C REC-A REC-B CTY-A CTY-B WOR-A WOR-B All options possible subject to other factors, although all planning and conservation officers will be cognisant of the NPPF.	
L O C A T I O N				L O C A T I O N
V A L U E S				V A L U E S

Part 2 – characteristics end use type

On the next two pages I will explain in more details how the Framework would be used in practice. Following that, I will test the application of the Framework against three churches of which I already have some knowledge or experience. These are St Anne's Moseley, a church with which I am associated but which I know may close, St John the Baptist Coleford, a project for which I have just obtained an unviable planning consent, and Umberslade Baptist Chapel, a project I am working on with the owner.

Framework – using it in practice

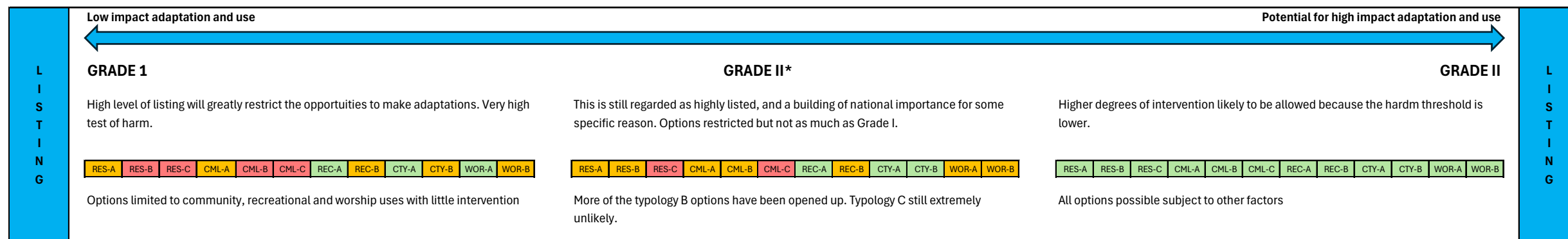
STAGE 1

For each of the seven adaptation drivers, analyse the church and select the most appropriate of the three positions on the scale. Some of these are a straightforward objective question, for instance the level of listing or the denomination, while others need either some market research, such as the local values, or more specialised knowledge such as the attitude of the local planning authority. Some of the answers have a degree of subjectivity.

The three positions on the scale are essentially answers to a question, for example, the questions and answers might be:

What is the level of listing? Grade II*

What are local values like? Medium



So, for example, if the church is Grade II* listed, that is the answer to this first question, and you select the Outcome Ribbon appropriate to that answer, i.e.



Repeat for all seven adaptation drivers, collecting seven 'Outcome Ribbons'

Framework – using it in practice

STAGE 2

The seven Outcome Ribbons from the analysis of the adaptation drivers are combined in a vertical stack as shown below:

APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK TO ST JOHN THE BAPTIST COLEFORD

LISTING	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
CONDITION	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
PLANNERS	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
DENOMINATION	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
SIZE	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
LOCATION	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
VALUES	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
OVERALL	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B

Red Outcomes – unlikely to be viable or permitted

Green Outcomes – most likely to be viable and permitted

Reading vertically then down the columns, select the worst case outcome and take that down to the Overall Outcome Ribbon at the bottom. So in this case, RES-C and CML-C, the two most intensive typologies for residential and commercial use, both have a red flag and so pursuing those will be fruitless.

Eight possible Outcomes come out as amber – these are possible, but challenging.

Two possible Outcomes are all green – REC-A and CTY-A – these are Recreational or Community Uses, with a low level of intervention. These are therefore the Outcomes most likely to succeed for this church and the ones which should be taken forward.

Note in this case, the Red Outcomes are being driven by the approach of the planners – conservative conservation officers are so unlikely to permit high levels of intervention it is not worth pursuing. However on the other hand, Recreational and Community Uses may need to be grant supported, and will almost certainly result in no capital return for the selling Diocese.

The Framework will now be applied to three churches of which I have some knowledge to test its applicability and to show how it would be used in practice.

Example 1 - St Anne's Moseley

Overview

Building type/style	Basic gothic church with spire
Faith	Church of England
Status	Active for worship but one of three churches in a single parish/benefice group, with a small congregation. Known to be at risk of closure.
Location	Urban setting in relatively up-market Birmingham suburb
Age	Built 1874
Listing	II
Brief history	The church was built to become a daughter church of St Mary's Moseley, on land provided by the owner of Moseley Hall and the building gifted by a wealthy parishioner. A choir vestry was added in 1898 and a baptistry in 1923. All of the church glass is post-war, an air raid having caused damage in 1940.
Issues	Risk of closure Tight site Very large tower and spire Current church hall has structural/drainage issues
Positives	High value and popular residential area Neighbouring vicarage could provide additional land for access Well maintained building Interior is relatively undecorated



Listing and Significance

Level of listing
(Grade II, II*, I)

Listing particulars – Reasons for Designation (source: Historic England)

The Anglican Church of St Anne, its lych gate, northern boundary wall and piers, are designated at Grade II, for the following principal reasons:

- The church is a robust design of 1874 by the recognised C19 architect, Frederick Preedy
- The exterior shows impressive massing, and demonstrates good detailing, showing a high degree of quality in its execution
- Its interior has good quality stonework and interesting roof structures
- Three stained glass windows of the mid-C20 are of interest, including one which celebrates sanctity of work through a depiction of the Birmingham metal trades
- The church, northern boundary wall, piers and timber-framed lych gate form a related group

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Condition

Condition



This church is in fundamentally good condition. An adaptive reuse project would not be dealing with exceptional repair costs. The issues are with the church hall and its drainage, but that building might not be kept as part of a project anyway.

For the Framework the condition is assessed as good, placing no restrictions on typology or use.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Planners

Local planning
authority
approach

Birmingham City Council is one of the largest planning authorities in the country, and is very pro-regeneration for economic growth. Heritage is a key part of the strategy. Unusually the Council has a specialist group called the Conservation and Heritage Panel (BCHP) to provide additional expertise for applications involving listed buildings:



The BCHP includes a range of experienced women and men from the heritage and design sectors who scrutinise the development proposals and plans which will shape the city.

These professionals from Birmingham and beyond meet monthly to assist officers in critiquing projects that will aid heritage-led regeneration, linking conservation initiatives to transport, housing, cultural and wider economic strategies across the city.

This suggests a positive position from planners who, whilst mindful of the NPPF, support developers and adaptive reuse. Again, this presents no particular barriers under the Framework.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

Denomination

Denomination
Protestant,
Catholic,
Non-conformist

St Anne's was built as a parish church as Moseley expanded, paid for by a wealthy local landowner, hence its monumental scale. It is now a combined Church of England parish, with three parish churches where it only realistically needs two, hence the need for adaptive reuse.

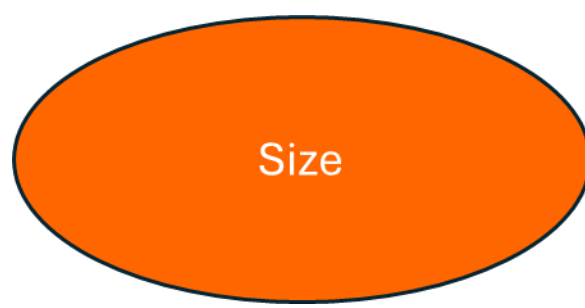
Although built with considerable scale, the church feels very light and open. Whitewashed walls, high roof, wide span but with side aisles, relatively clear of ornament and the pews have already been removed. All these help with adaptation.

The lack of stained glass, which one might usually associate with a CofE church, is also helpful because subdivision of the space will still enable smaller spaces to have light.



RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Size



Potential additional buildable area



This is a relatively large church. Net internal area of the ground floor is approximately 420m² and the church hall is a further 310 m². The tower and spire are disproportionately large, built to provide a landmark on its hilltop position.

The church is set in a churchyard which gives scope for additional building, particularly if the church hall is demolished. There is also land either side of the churchyard at the back, the end of the vicarage garden and some garages and car parking for the neighbouring housing association development, that could provide further scope.

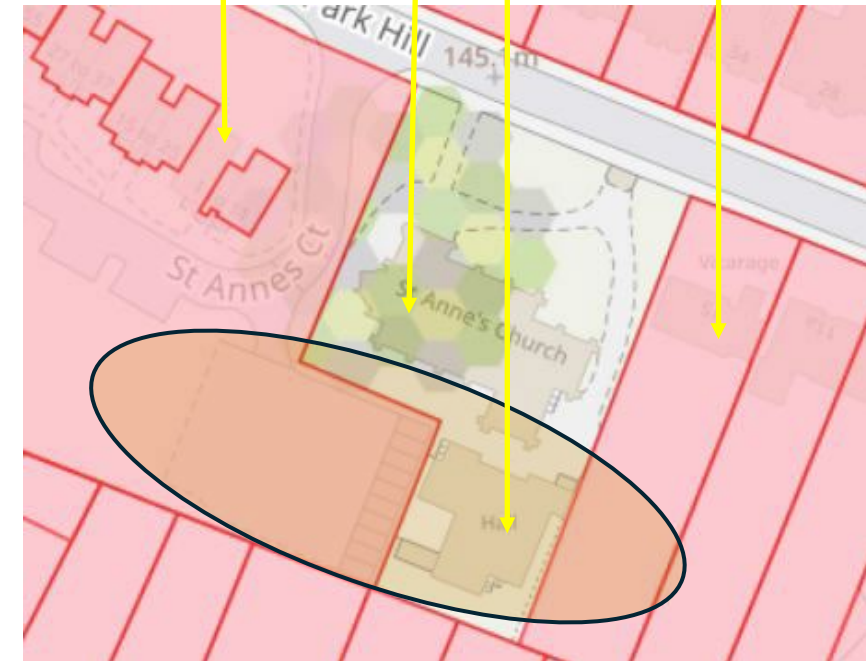
These factors make the scale an advantage for plenty of uses so for the purposes of the Framework the church is considered to be large.

Housing association residential care

Church

Hall

Vicarage

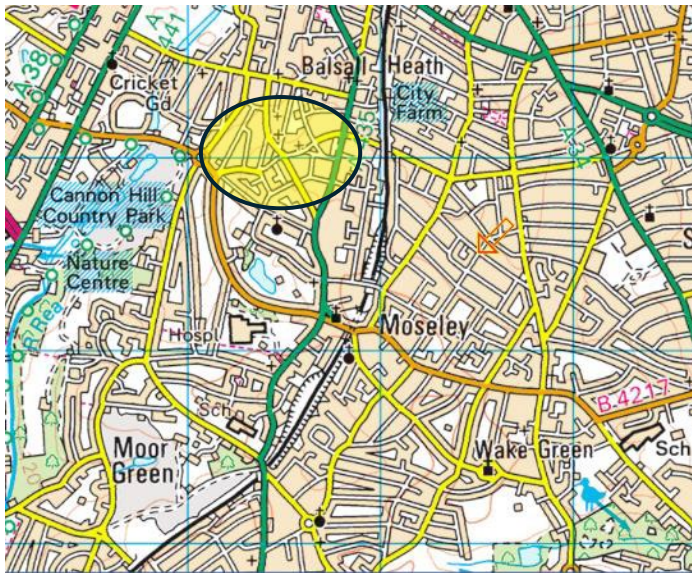


RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Location

Location
(Rural, Urban,
City)

Moseley is one of the suburbs of Birmingham, close to the city centre on the south side. The villages of Harborne, Edgbaston and Moseley all expanded rapidly in Victorian and Edwardian times, but being on the ‘country’ side of the city rather than the ‘industrial’ side, they were affluent residential areas, and remain so.



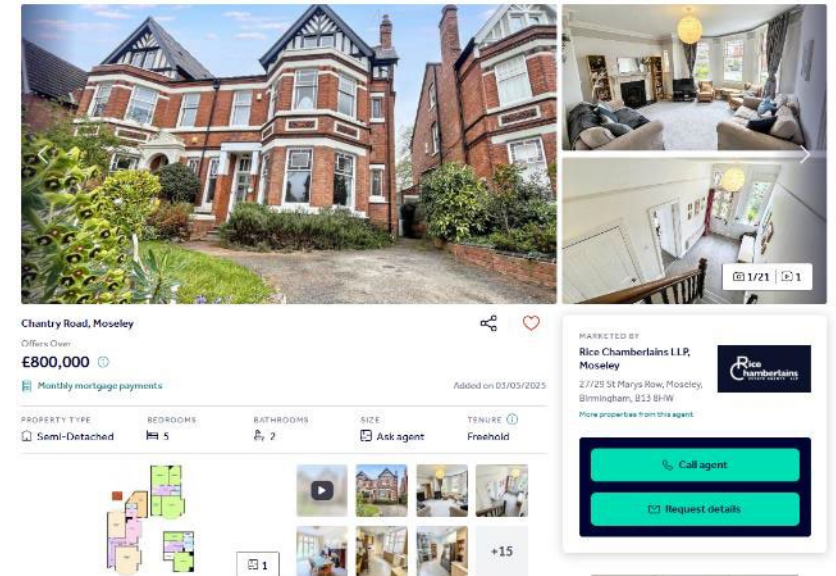
The church is surrounded by housing. The large mansions opposite are mostly subdivided into flats, while the block to the left (west) is a supported retirement scheme owned by Bromford Housing Association.



For the purposes of the Framework the church will be considered to be in an urban area.

Values

Local values
(residential or
commercial)



Moseley is one of the more affluent suburbs of Birmingham, characterised by large houses but also a large apartment and retirement market. St Anne’s is close to the prime road (Chantry Road above) in the whole of Moseley.

For the purposes of the Framework the values will be considered high.

Framework Summary

The final stage of the application of the Framework is to amalgamate all the individual assessments and identify which end use types are still viable. This is done in the table below.

APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK TO ST ANNE'S MOSELEY

LISTING
CONDITION
PLANNERS
DENOMINATION
SIZE
LOCATION
VALUES

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B

OVERALL

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Conclusion

Only options ruled out are the single space residential and commercial options because the church is too big. More intensive approaches, i.e. RES-B and RES-C, could be possible. WOR-B, retained worship with complementary uses could be attractive in the area. These options and some precedents will now be considered.

RES-B

RES-C

precedents

Community use retaining worship
Size and location of church could support a variety of uses.
Possible insertion of single use structures such as this bookshop (below left) and library (below right) (see pages 11 and 19)



Intensive residential
Definitely possible . The St James Edgbaston conversion (above) is not dissimilar.

Is something as bold as this possible?



Multi residence with development in curtilage
Possible if there is space, although it won't be as much as this. Only footprint for additional building is the church hall site.

Possible extension as with Holy Trinity Bolton below. Higher quality of design would be required in Moseley.



Option 1 – WOR-B

Retain worship with additional uses

Other uses in churches retaining worship

Examples from precedent studies

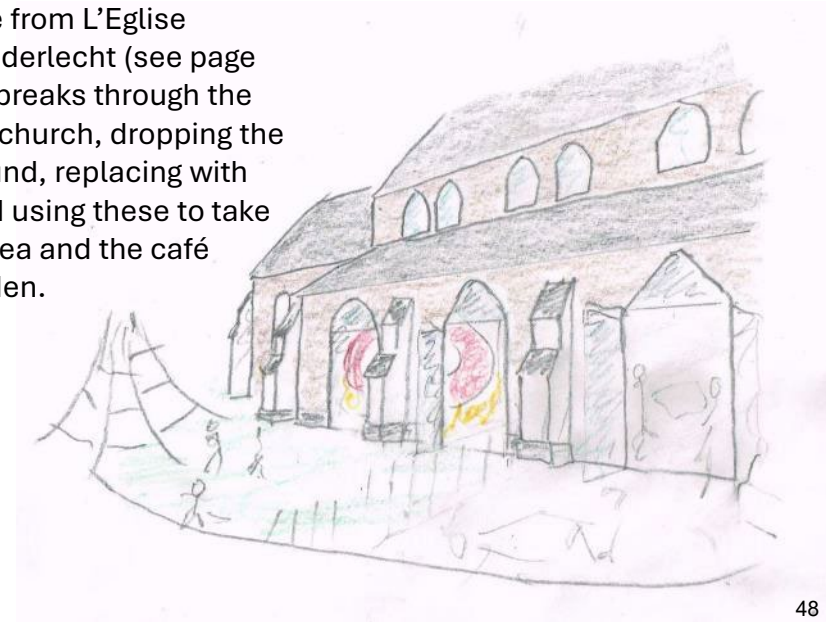
Activity	Precedent	Potential at St Anne's
Soft play centre	St James' West Hampstead	Yes - nearest soft play is c. 2 miles
Café	Numerous	Only as ancillary to soft play - Moseley full of cafes
Post Office	St James' West Hampstead	No - Moseley OK for Post Offices
Community bank	All Saints' Murston	No - that precedent works in a poor area
Library	St Marien, Munchberg	Yes - Birmingham closing its libraries
Offices	Oldbury	No - looking for community use
Events venue	All Saints' Bennington	Possible, but church hall can do that
Village shop	St Giles, Langford	Not needed in Moseley
Bookable space	St James' West Hampstead	Yes - spaces could be made bookable

St James' West Hampstead is the outstanding example of multi community use of a church that retains worship in the UK. Known as the Sherriff Centre, for six days a week it is used for soft play, a café, a Post Office, stationery shop, community support. The primary income generator is the soft play centre, combined with the café.



Taking reference from L'Eglise Performante, Anderlecht (see page 17), this design breaks through the envelope of the church, dropping the windows to ground, replacing with glass doors, and using these to take both the play area and the café out into the garden.

The inside of the church gets seen and opened up.



Option 2 –

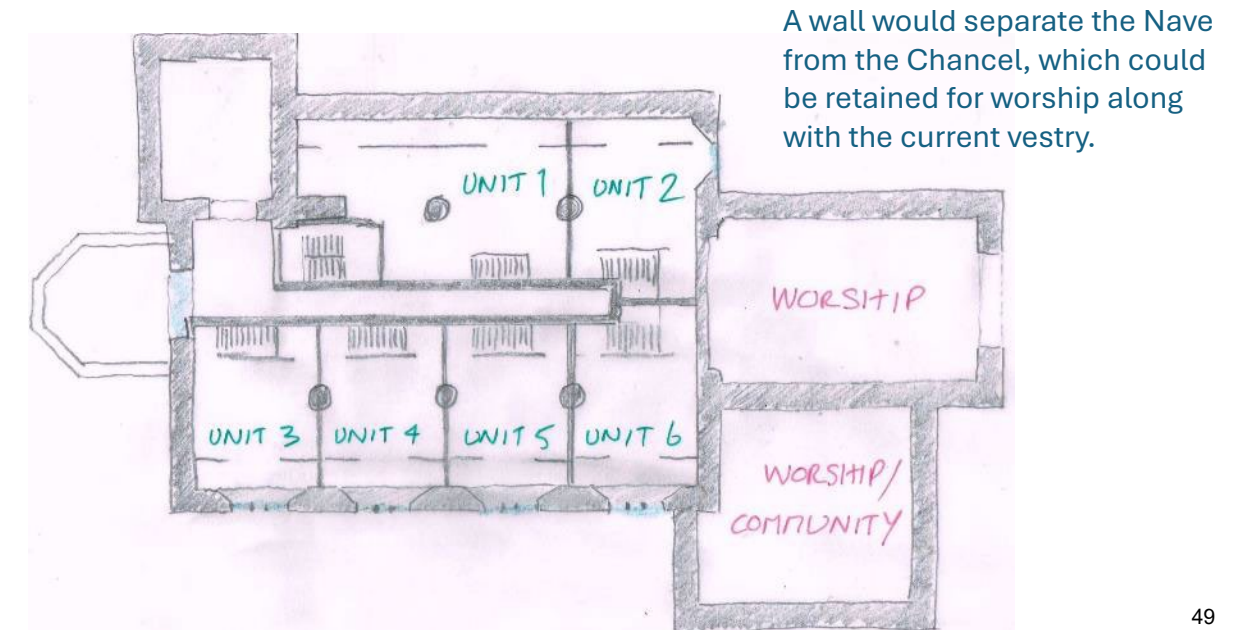
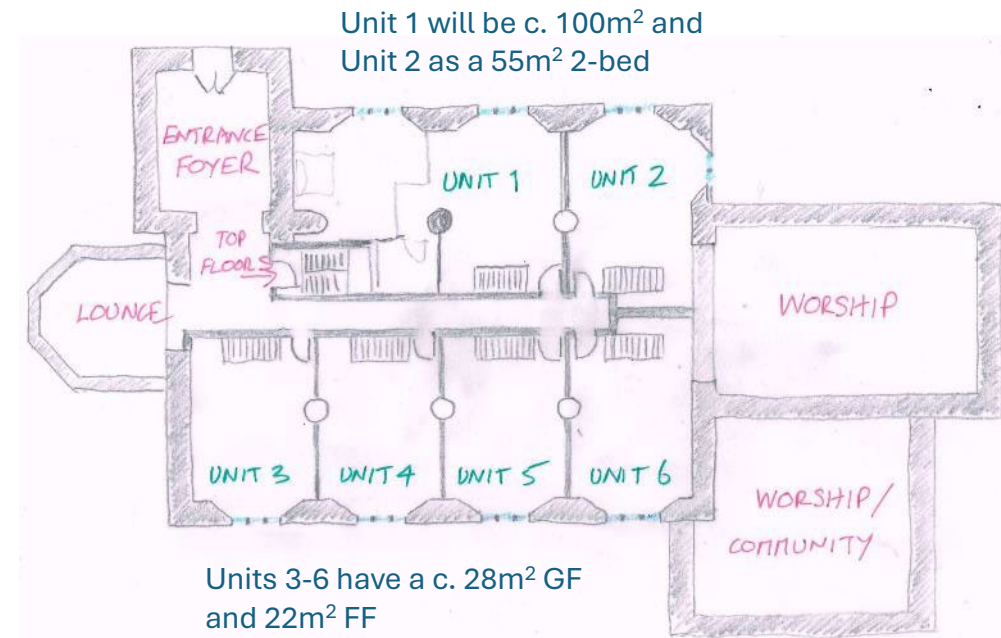
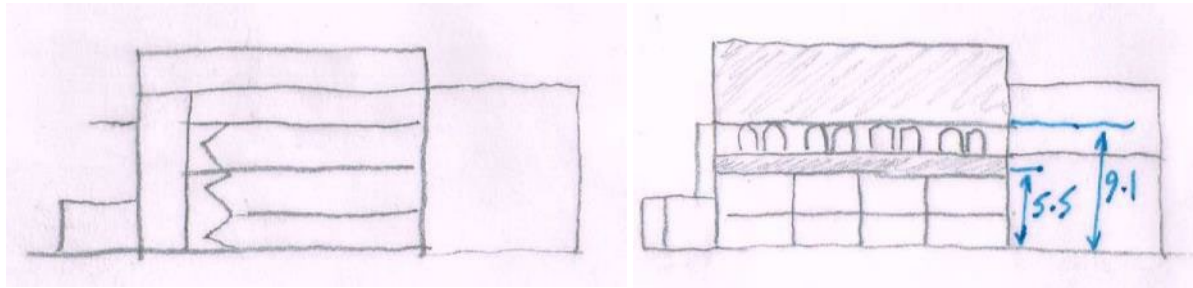
RES-B

WOR-B

This option combines the WOR-B outcome, worship with additional uses, that additional use being residential. Part of nave of the church is converted into apartments and worship is retained in the Chancel and Vestry. The section and window configuration lends itself to a scheme of single and duplex apartments. The side aisle roof slopes at around 5.5m allowing for a duplex with sloping roof to the upper floor, and the main roofline is at 9.1m allowing a full height second floor and then rooms in the roof space (see below right).

Upper floors of the duplexes and the roof rooms would need rooflights.

Circulation to the upper floors could be served from the current main entrance. A lift could be fitted into that core.



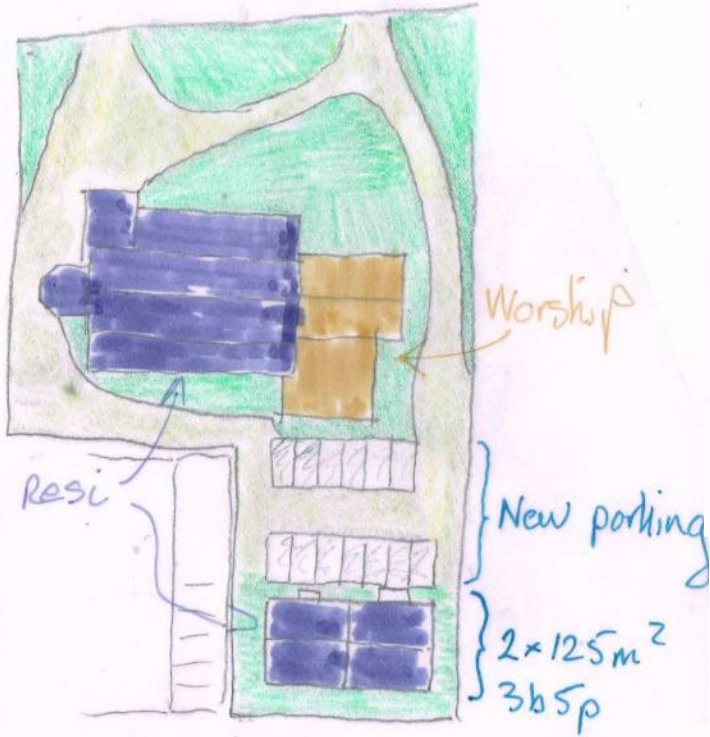
Option 2 –

RES-B

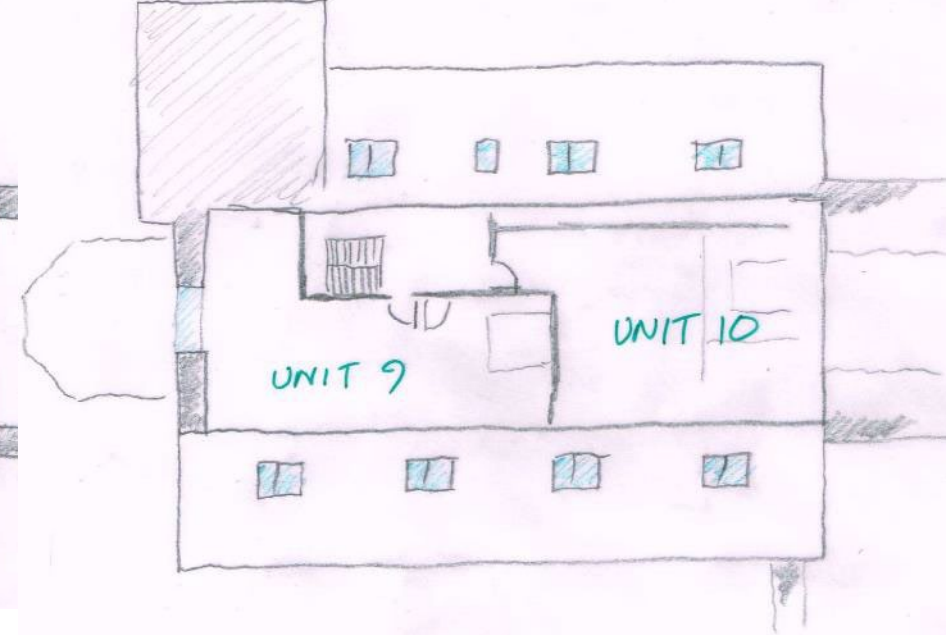
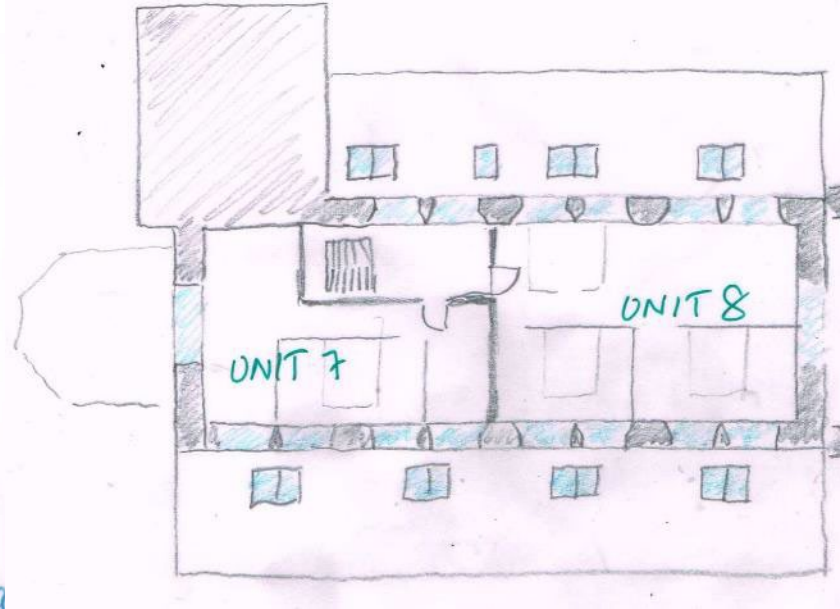
WOR-B

Unit 7 will be c. 40m²
one bed, and Unit 8 is a
60m² 2-bed

Units 9 and 10 will both be
c. 42m² one beds



Replacing the current church hall with residential would allow two reasonably sized semi detached houses. It could accommodate more apartments, but leaving it as shown here means that all the parking for the scheme can be behind the church.



The houses could provide income to maintain the church.

		Area	
		m2	ft2
Unit 1	2 bed duplex	99	1066
Unit 2	1 bed duplex	55	592
Unit 3	1 bed duplex	50	538
Unit 4	1 bed duplex	50	538
Unit 5	1 bed duplex	50	538
Unit 6	1 bed duplex	55	592
Unit 7	1 bed	40	431
Unit 8	2 bed	60	646
Unit 9	1 bed	40	431
Unit 10	1 bed	45	484
Houses		250	2691
Floor totals		794	

Option 2 – RES-B WOR-B - viability

Development Appraisal					
Church Conversion, St Anne's Moseley					
Number of units	12				
			Total		
Site acquisition costs			£12,000	0.50%	
a Cost of site		£0			Church will get the houses for rent
b Acquisition fees					
c Legal fees		£10,000			
d Compensation					
e SDLT		£2,000			
Construction costs			£1,823,800	75.23%	
a Access and s278 works		£20,000			
b Demolitions		£70,000			Dropping church hall
c Services and drainage upgrade		£40,000			Potentially needs a substation
d Building works		£1,646,800			Build contingency needs to cover sundry non measured items at this stag
e Landscaping and external works		£35,000			Tree work, handstanding, garden
f Warranties		£12,000			
Fees			£215,285	8.88%	
a Design - architect	4.00%	£72,952			
b QS	1.50%	£27,357			1.5% of building work
c					
d Additional design services and surveys		£40,000			Further drawings for delivery etc
e Service enquiries		£1,500			
f Project Management	2.00%	£36,476			
g Planning consent		£7,000			Includes £1,000 Pre app
h Section agreement costs/CIL		£30,000			Offsite contribution
Finance	7.00%		£127,666	5.27%	
Development Contingency	10.00%		£182,380	7.52%	
Sales and Marketing costs			£63,098	2.60%	
a Marketing		£2,500			General collateral production
b Agent	1.25%	£36,598			
c Legals	2000	£24,000			
NETT DEVELOPMENT COST			£2,424,229	100.00%	
SALE VALUE			£2,927,808		
Nett Development Margin			20.77%		£503,579

Development appraisal

This is a form of initial development appraisal a develop might do to test viability based on outline design. Few of the numbers are tested other than market knowledge.

Notes

The new build within the body of the church is 545m² and has been priced at £2,200 / m². The rental housing would be relatively basic and has been priced at £1,800 m².

Although no purchase consideration has been included, the assumption is that the church would be given the two houses for rental income, which would provide c. £50k pa.

Values have all been set at £500psf which would make the largest apartment worth £530,000 and the smallest £90,000. This is reasonable for the area.

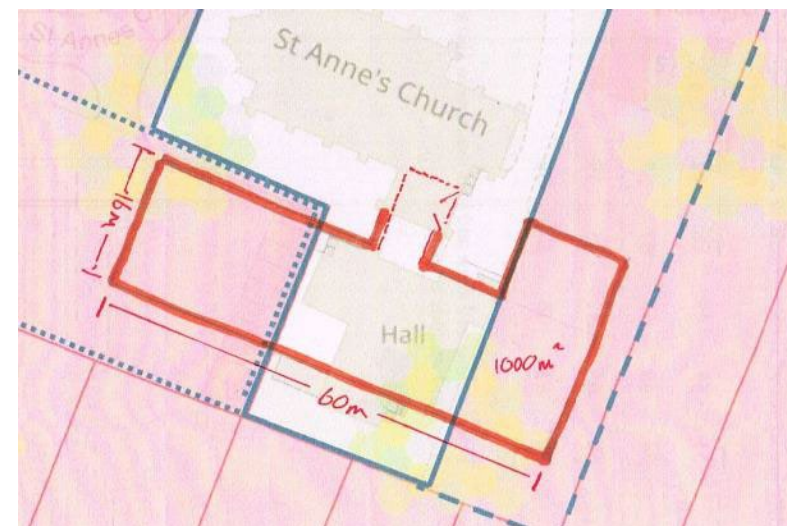
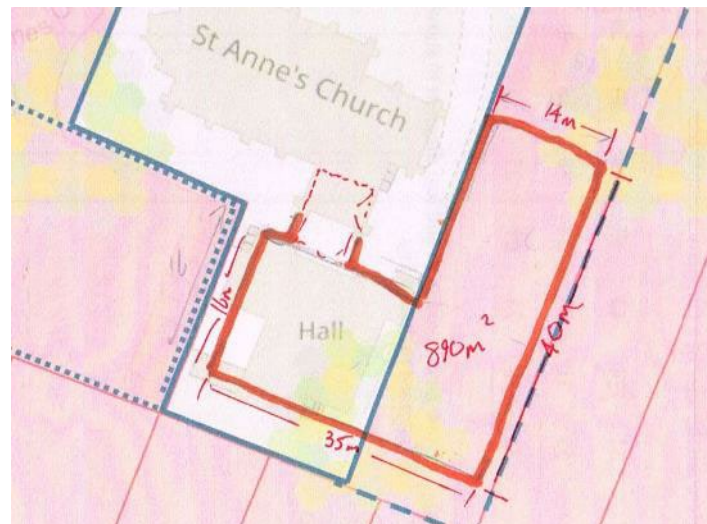
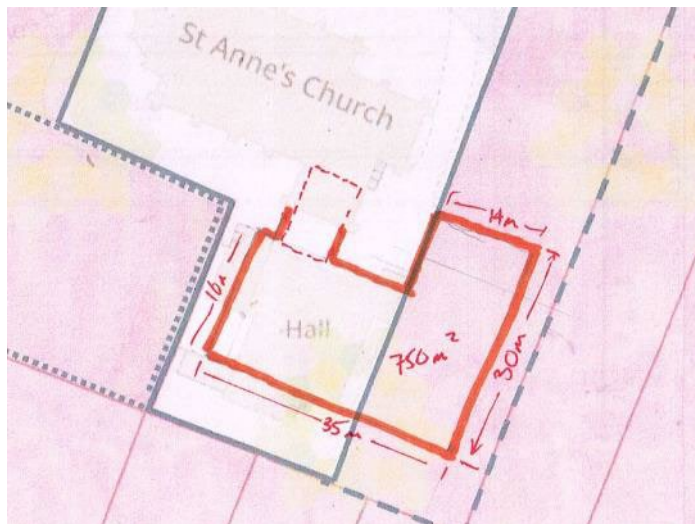
So it is viable?

Yes this looks to be viable. The scheme benefits from there being no exceptional repair costs. There is also the possibility of putting an apartment into the tower and spire, but then access to the rest of the apartments would need to be reconsidered.

Option 3 – RES-C Senior living / retirement / care

This option relies on a new block being built to the rear of the church, linked through to the main building with a common reception. The site probably isn't big enough for this to be institutional care, so would be more of a retirement scheme, with some communal lounge facilities (no dining).

Block planning just to test constraints and establish approximate NIA and number of apartments. Would need full internal resolution.



750m² NIA @ 80% net to gross = 600m²
10 x 60m² apartments on 3 floors = 30 units

890m² NIA @ 80% net to gross = 712m²
12 x 60m² apartments on 3 floors = 36 units

Privacy issues over neighbour's garden would be a concern.

1000m² NIA @ 80% net to gross = 800m²
12 x 60m² and 2 x 40m² apartments on 3 floors = 42 units

Purchase of Bromford's car park assumed
Maybe step down the block on neighbour boundary

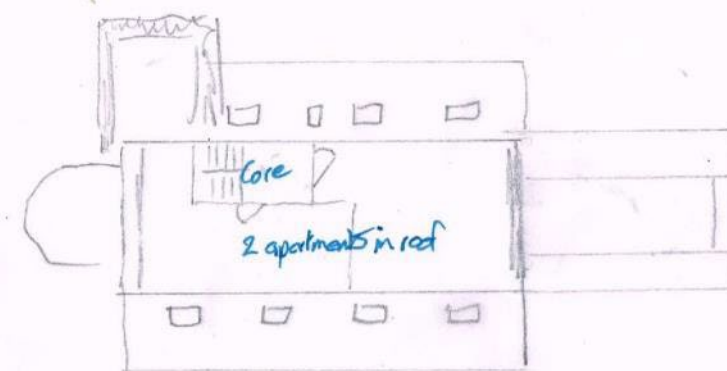
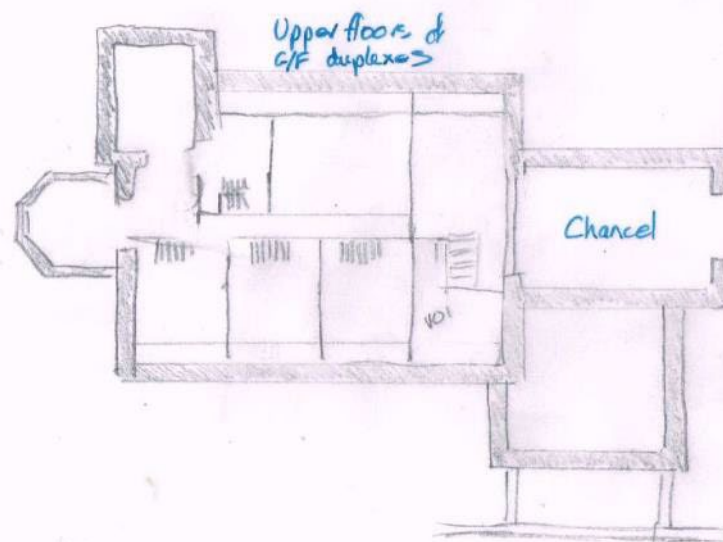
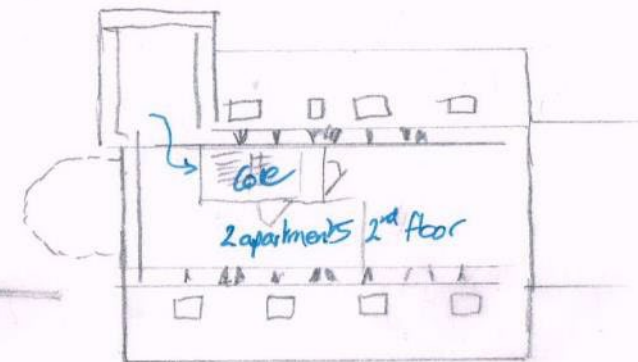
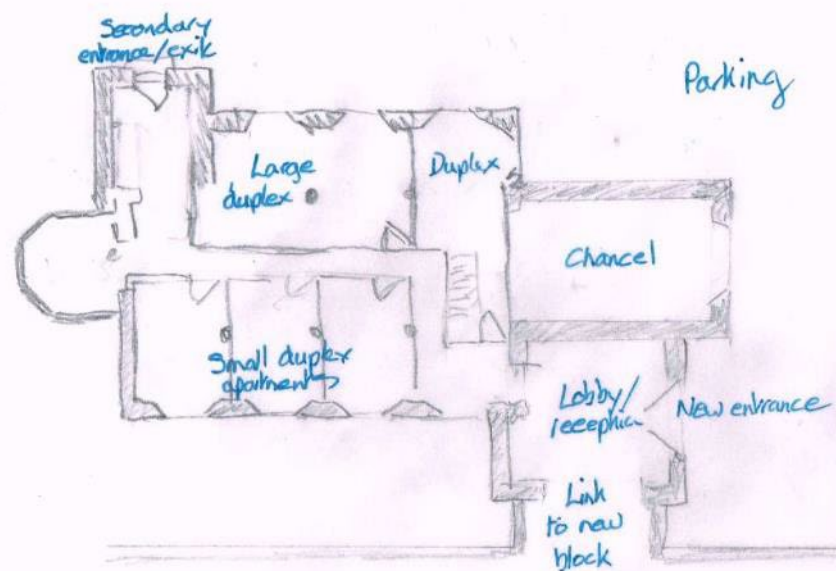
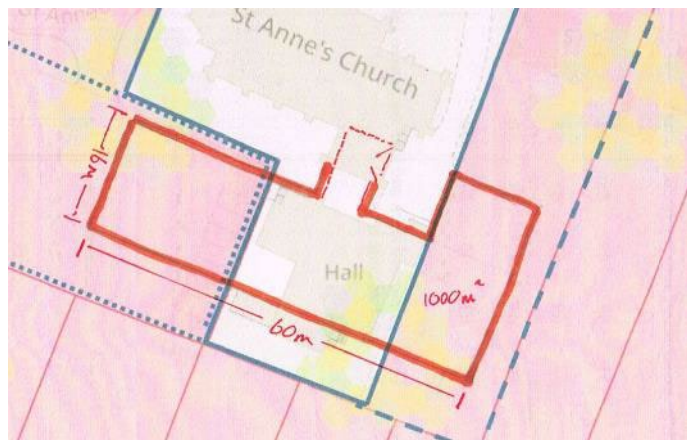
This option to be developed further

Option 3 – RES-C Senior living / retirement / care

This is a further space planning exercise for the third option, considering access to upper floors through the existing church entrance / tower. The design of the church draws on the Option 2 residential scheme, but losing one apartment on each floor to allow for circulation from the main reception. Secondary access through the tower to all apartments. This would make the overall scheme 50 units.

Viability

Given the residential scheme was viable, this should also be viable given the additional scale, even allowing for the loss of communal space.



Example 2 - St John the Baptist, Coleford

Overview

Building type/style	Victorian church in the Latin cross and semi-circular apse style
Denomination	Church of England
Status	Closed for worship 10 years ago. Currently empty and deteriorating.
Location	Urban setting in a modest town in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire. Scale and position means it dominates the townscape
Age	Completed in 1880
Listing	II
Brief history	The church was designed by F S Waller of Gloucester, It replaced an earlier church in order to provide a larger church than the recently built Baptist Church in Coleford – an example of the competitive over-building of Protestant churches in the Victorian era. A proposed south west tower was never completed.
Issues	Tight site Very large building Deteriorating condition Low value area despite being in the Forest of Dean
Positives	Relative plain interior, devoid of ornament Large areas of clear glazing Not yet dilapidated



Listing and Significance

Level of listing
(Grade II, II*, I)

Listing particulars – Reasons for Designation

St John the Baptist Coleford is designated at Grade II, with the following Listing Particulars:

Large parish church. 1880 F.S. Waller, and 1885 chancel and transepts S. Gambier-Parry. Rock face rubble stone brought to courses with ashlar dressings, tiled roof with double gables on both transepts. Latin cross with apsed east end. 4-bay nave with tall 2-light windows with plate tracery, buttresses between with drafted margins. Angle buttresses to transepts. Gabled porch to north west end. West end has two 3-light windows with geometrical tracery. Interior: complex steep timber struttled collar roof on stone corbels with wind bracing with elaborately decorated timber work rood over chancel. Oak reredos carved as 1914-18 War memorial by Sir Charles Nicholson. Also fine C20 oak lectern and pulpit and screen to North transept. Stained glass east window 1958 Francis Stephens. Carved stone chancel screen and stone piscina to right of reredos.

Overall the listing does not cause particular problems for adaptive reuse – all options remain open

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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The roof is a striking internal feature and may need to remain exposed; similarly the rood over the Chancel. The pews are not mentioned so there should be no barriers to their removal.



The church has a particular significance to the skyline of the town.



Oak reredos is a significant feature especially as it is a war memorial.

Condition

Condition



Externally the building is in reasonable condition, but commensurate with minimal maintenance done in the 10 years since closure.



There are damaged windows, evidence of water ingress, blocked rainwater goods, but no gaping holes. Roof difficult to assess.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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As this is in a medium and typical condition for a closed church, nothing is ruled out, but the repairs will need to be factored into the price, and for community uses more grant may be required to pay for repair works.

Planners

Local planning
authority
approach



Forest of Dean District Council is a relatively small planning authority. The Conservation Officer is not directly employed and is an archaeologist by training. Pre application meetings held by the Diocese with the planning authority had shown scepticism over residential uses. Community groups had been supported in their bids to buy the church from the Diocese indicating preference for some form or community use.

This suggests a cautious and possibly negative approach in terms of extensive intervention. Residential and commercial uses will be challenging as will any use with a high degree of intervention.

Denomination

Denomination
Protestant,
Catholic,
Non-conformist

Available By Private Treaty
SUBJECT TO CONTRACT
ST JOHN'S CHURCH
COLEFORD
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

LOCATION
Prominent within the town settlement of Coleford

DESCRIPTION
Late 19th century Church with undoubted development potential subject to the necessary planning consents. The following items are available by separate negotiation: Pews, Organ, Pulpit, Font, Choir Stalls with Stonework, Chapel Screens.

SCHEDULE OF FLOOR AREA all measurements are approximate

Body of the Church	6,400 SFT
Lower ground floor/cellar	320 SFT
Lower ground floor/cellar	520 SFT
South Transept	7,240 SFT
Total internal floor area	23,000 SFT/0.5AC

SERVICES
Mains services are understood to be available. All interested parties will make their own enquiries.

RATES
UBR by application to the FDOC - (tel: 01594 810000)

TENURE
Offered Freehold vacant possession

PRICE
£500,000 - Offers invited. The price quoted is exclusive of VAT whether charged or not.

LEGAL COSTS
Both parties will be responsible for their own legal costs.

VIEWING
By prior appointment with KEVIN J. TOOMBS FRICS COMMERCIAL PROPERTY AGENTS.

On the Instructions of the Diocese of Gloucester and the Church Commissioners FOR SALE

alder king
PROPERTY CONSULTANTS

St John's Church
Boxbush Road
Coleford
Gloucestershire
GL16 8DN

7,240 sq ft (672.61 sq m) on 0.57 acres (0.23 hectares)

- Located close to town centre
- Prominent Grade II listed landmark building
- Potential for alternative uses subject to planning

Church of England. Closed and marketed for sale subject to planning. A lot of time was spent by the Diocese supporting a community group which thought it could save the building but ultimately there was no credible use for a building of this size.

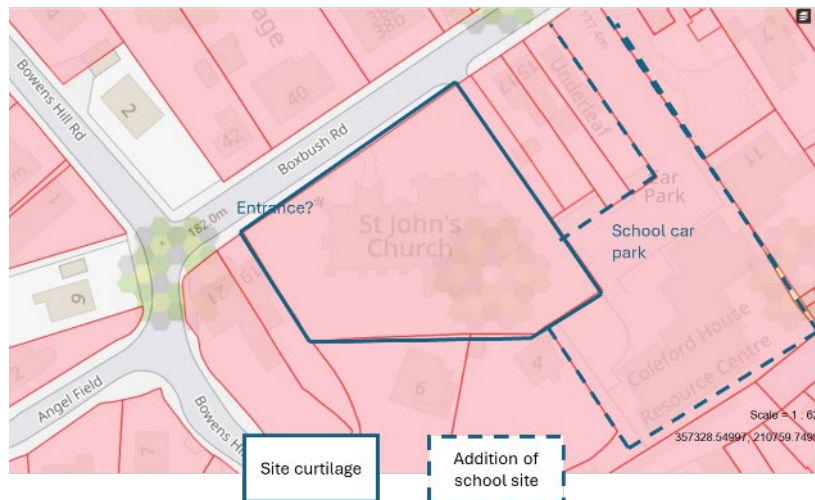
No restrictions on use other than the CofE's usual restrictions on 'profane' use and by other faiths.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Size

Size



This is a relatively large building. Agents' particulars quoted the interior at 7200 ft². It is a single undivided space without columns. Despite the church's size, the curtilage of the site is actually quite small, so there is limited room for car parking. If no further land is included, any design and development will be limited to the existing building envelope. The only feasible vehicular access is at the west end of the site on Boxbush Road.

Adjacent to the site is a former junior school building now used as a nursery which has a reasonably sized car park. This also enclosed a run of three small terraced houses.

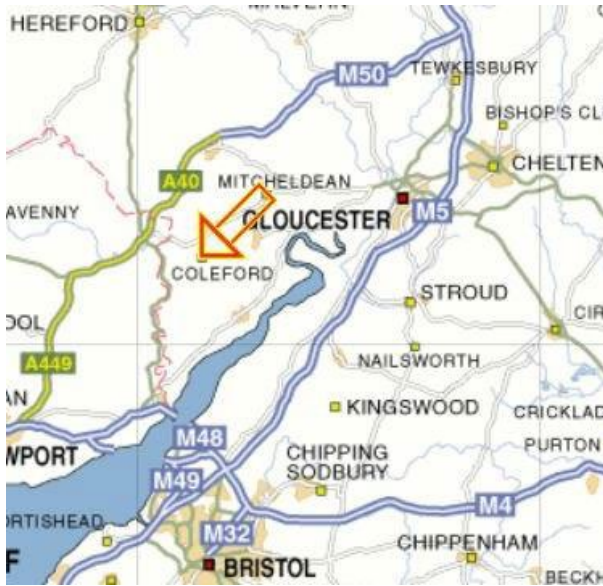
Given these challenges on scale, this church is a little bit more challenging than a medium sized church would usually be so under the Framework it will be considered to be large, with the restrictions that suggests.

Location

Location
(Rural, Urban,
City)

Coleford is one of the towns in the Forest of Dean, a geographical and cultural area of west Gloucestershire, in between the Rivers Wye and Severn. It is generally thought that while the landscape of the Forest is attractive, the individual towns such as Mitcheldean, Cinderford and Coleford are much less so, and highly insular.

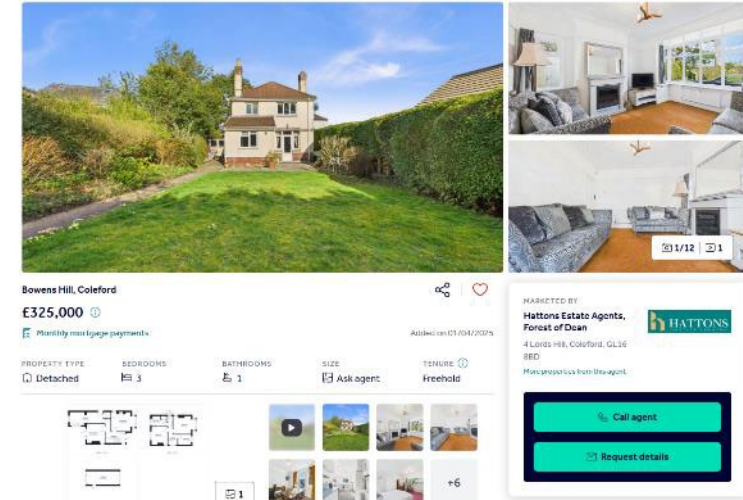
The church is located at the top of a gently rising street near the town centre. It is surrounded by housing which is generally of higher quality than the majority of housing in Coleford.



For the purposes of the Framework the church will be considered to be in an urban area, albeit a town that is in a rural area.

Values

Local values
(residential or
commercial)



There is very little commercial market in Coleford so a commercial use is unlikely. Residential values are quite low although the church is in the best area of the town. This example near the church is being marketed at an equivalent of £3600/m² which is modest when build costs are £2200/m² and roof repairs may be needed.

For the purposes of the Framework the values will be considered medium.

Framework Summary

The final stage of the application of the Framework is to amalgamate all the individual assessments and identify which end use types are still viable. This is done in the table below.

APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK TO ST JOHN THE BAPTIST COLEFORD

LISTING	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
CONDITION	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
PLANNERS	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
DENOMINATION	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
SIZE	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
LOCATION	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
VALUES	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
OVERALL	RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B

Conclusion

High density residential or commercial use has been ruled out. This is principally due to the conservative approach of the local planning authority. Eight options are shown as amber which means they would be possible, but might be quite difficult, need grant, etc. The two favoured options remaining green are REC-A (Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Arts: Single use whole space) and CTY-A (Community: Single volume possibly including worship). These options along with some precedents will now be considered.

REC-A

CTY-A

Precedents



SK8 Liborius, St Louis, Missouri



Santa Barbara, Llanera, Spain



*All Saints', Bennington, Rodney Melville & Partners
Cultural events venue but can hold services, and
weddings*



*St James, West Hampstead
Additional community uses, including soft
play centre, café, and Post Office*



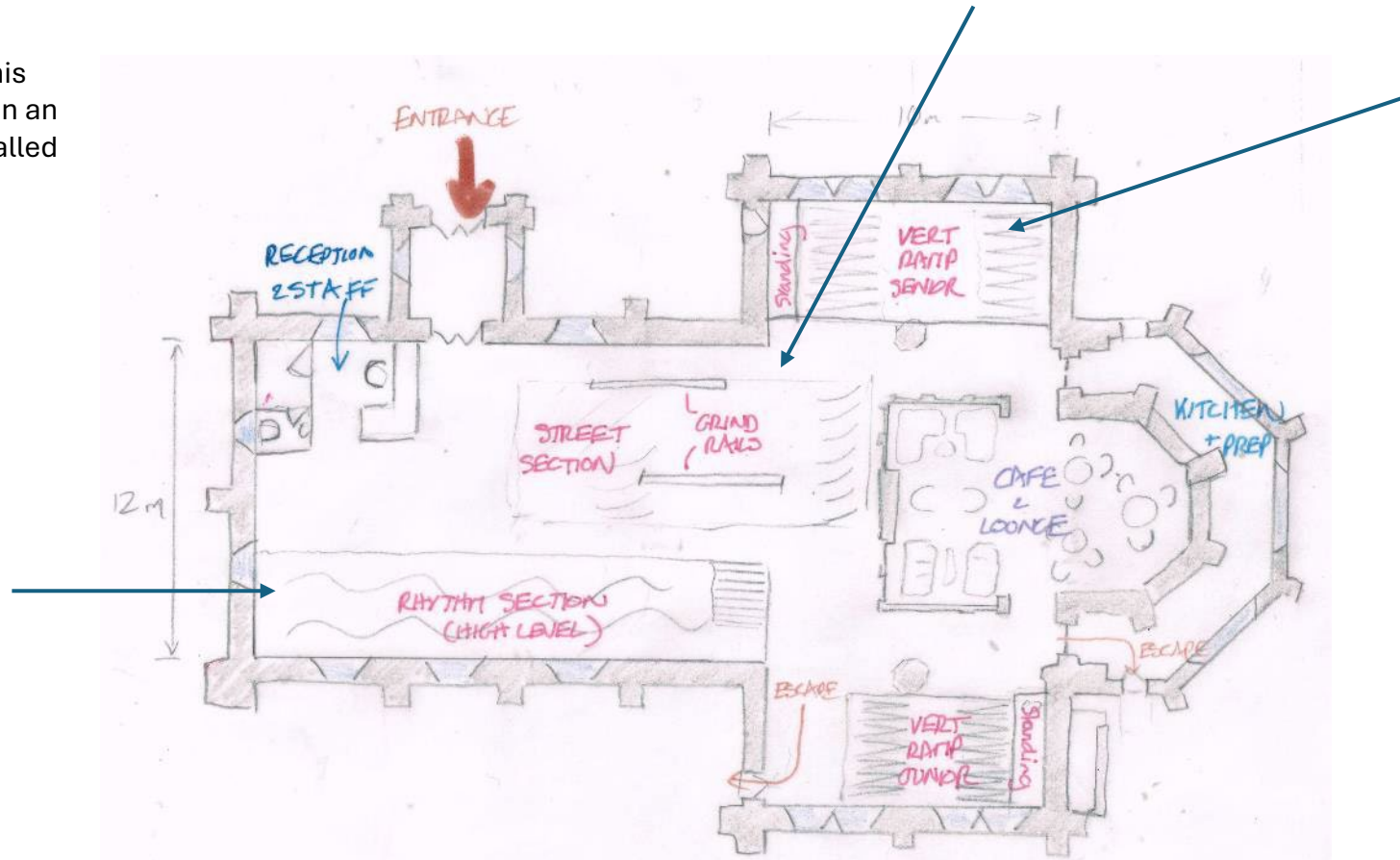
*Community use not retaining worship. Large volume could support some
sort of sport/recreational use. Coleford does not appear to have too much
for young people to do and the Forest of Dean promotes recreational visits.*



Option 1 – REC-A Skatepark

From my precedent studies there are a number of churches that have been converted to recreational use, including skateparks and climbing centres. Such uses look for buildings in residential areas, with good transport links, and where the building is inexpensive to own or rent. They are rarely found in new or premium properties, but in warehouses, factory buildings, etc.

Inspiration for the features of this design come from a skatepark in an old tram shed in Birmingham called Creations, and the precedent photographs are from there.

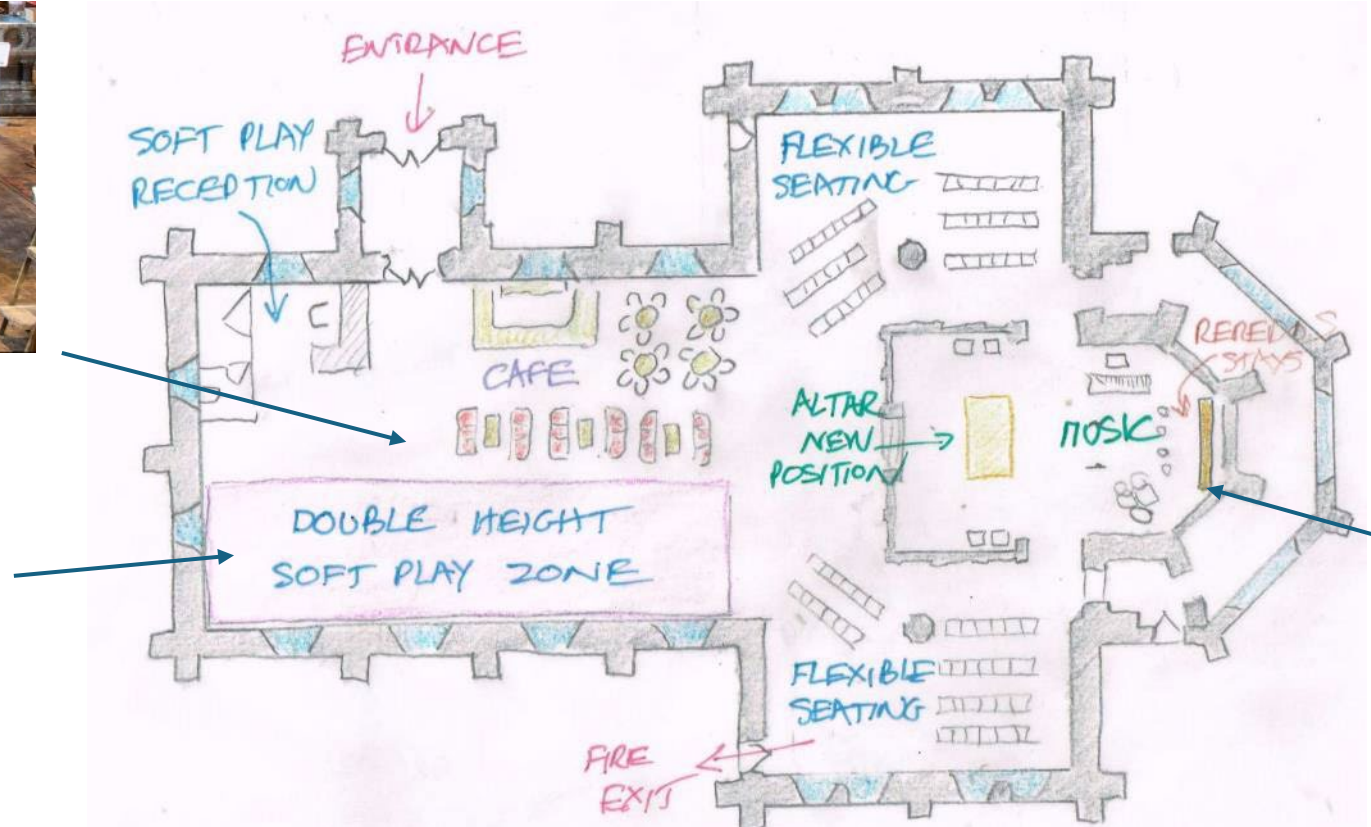


This works well. All the key features of Creations can be fitted into the building, the raised 'Rhythm section' enables other rooms such as the customer toilets to be located beneath, the former vestry in the apse works for a kitchen/prep area. Means of access and escape are OK.

Option 2 – CTY-A *Mixed community use including modern worship space*

There are relatively few churches which have managed to retain worship use while introducing additional community uses. Whether worship could be brought back to St John's is not known, and the Parish may not even want to do it, but it could be one of a number of uses in a flexible layout. This design draws inspiration from St James' West Hampstead.

The altar has been brought forward to suit the more modern style of evangelical worship. Space behind the altar would be for the music group. Flexible seating in transept sides which can be moved for other functions.



Option 3 - RES-C Residential conversion

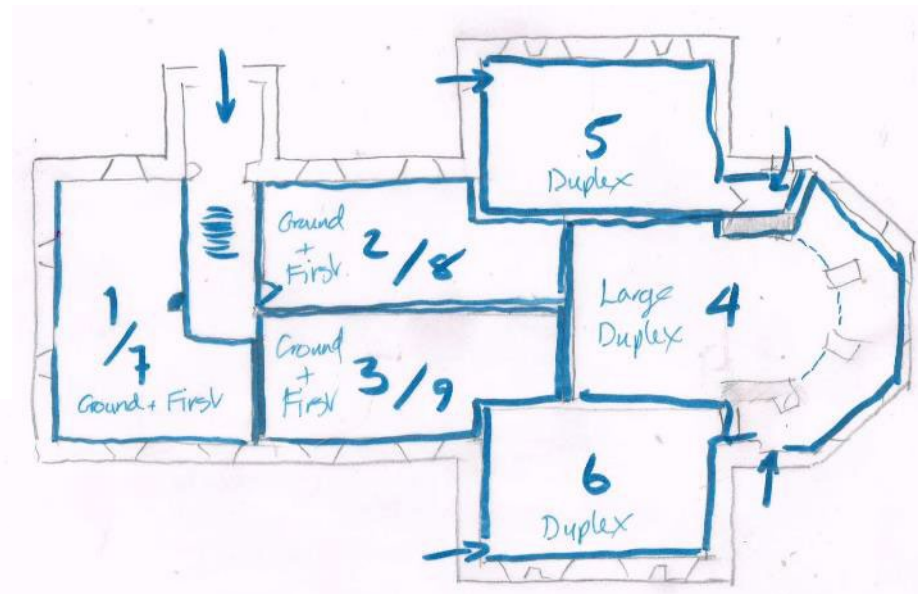
The Framework had intensive residential conversion as a 'red' option, however two schemes have been developed to test the possibilities. This particular scheme was put into planning.

The key constraint for the number of units is the available parking so this is considered first. 9 spaces and 2 visitor spaces at one per apartment would give 9 units.



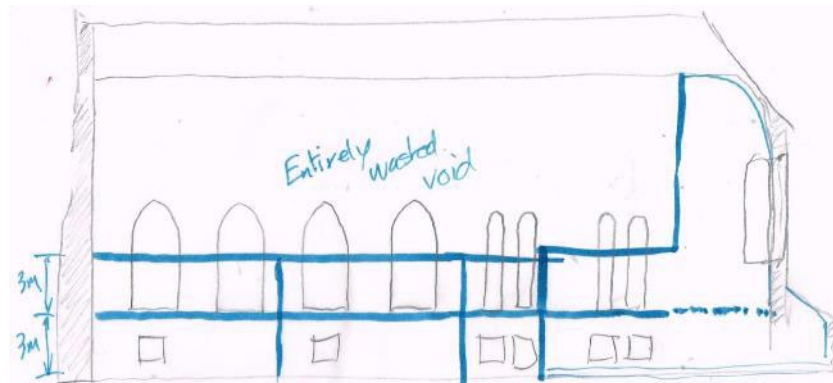
Viability

This scheme is probably not viable, as there are too few units to overcome the cost of replacing the roof and other works. The large unit may not be sellable in this market.



This section shows how big a building this is and hence how wasteful of space creating just 9 units would be. Two floors avoids the need for a lift. The signature large unit in the Chancel has a huge floor to ceiling height, which would be spectacular, but impractical in terms of heating and maintenance.

Three apartments on the ground floor at the west end are repeated on the second floor, with a staircase off the current main entrance lobby. The two transepts lend themselves to a pair of duplexes/townhouses especially as both can be accessed from existing external doors. The whole of the Chancel space needs to be a single unit. A mezzanine level is put over the kitchen at the back of the unit for two bedrooms, and two more can be put in the apse, with the current reredos wall removed.



Option 3b – **RES-C** Residential conversion

In a nod to Finegold Alexander Architects' conversion of the German Trinity Catholic Church in Boston (see below), this concept removes the roof of the church and builds apartments up to two levels beyond the top of the nave walls.

The form of the extension at Coleford would be a steel framed glass box, stepped back for a second level, with a roof terrace on top. As at Boston, the steel frame is essentially self supporting from its own foundations. A section of the original roofline has been retained, but could also be removed. The high part of the west gable may also need to be removed for stability reasons.

Would it get planning permission? Probably not as it would involve destruction of too much historic fabric.



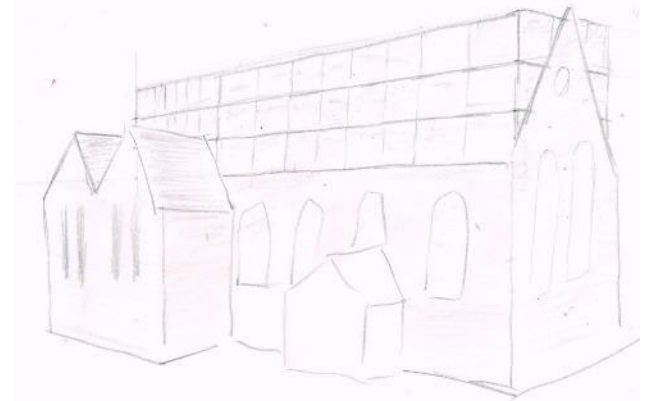
The Lucas at Shawmut Avenue

“We understand the history and significance to people living in the area, but it was no longer a church. It’s deconsecrated. We looked for a fresh combination of the new and the old.”

Jim Alexander , Finegold Alexander (Pohle, 2016)

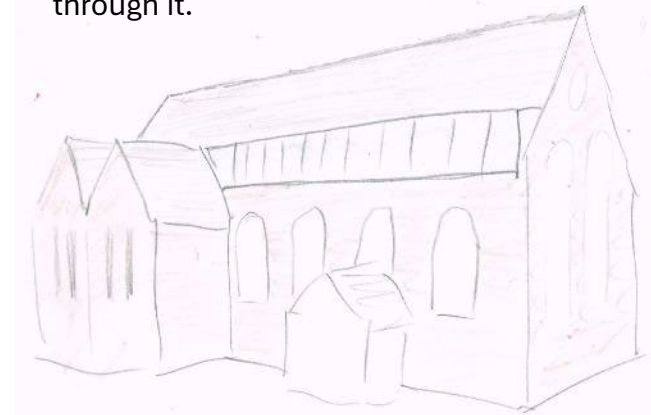


Does this work? Maybe not for this building and certainly not for this location, but the general concept of taking something away prior to addition should be tested more.



Options

Two further options – take the glass box up to the top of the gable end and lose all the reference to the roof, or keep the original roofline and just punch one glass box floor through it.



Viability

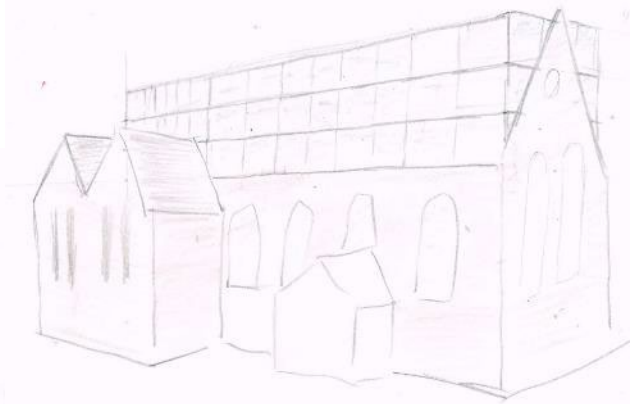
This probably is viable, subject to available parking. Increasing the number of units and removing the liability of the roof would reduce the cost per unit as well as one of the more difficult ongoing maintenance costs.

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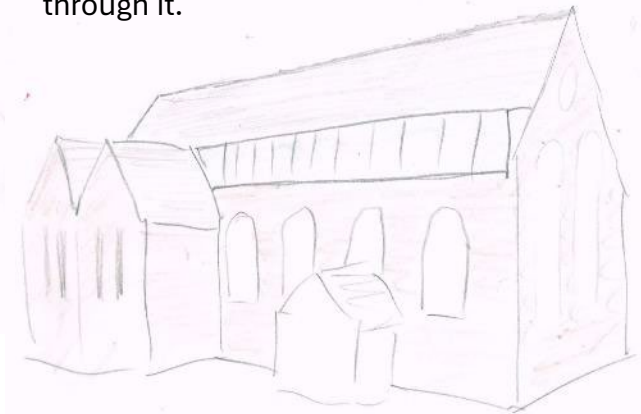
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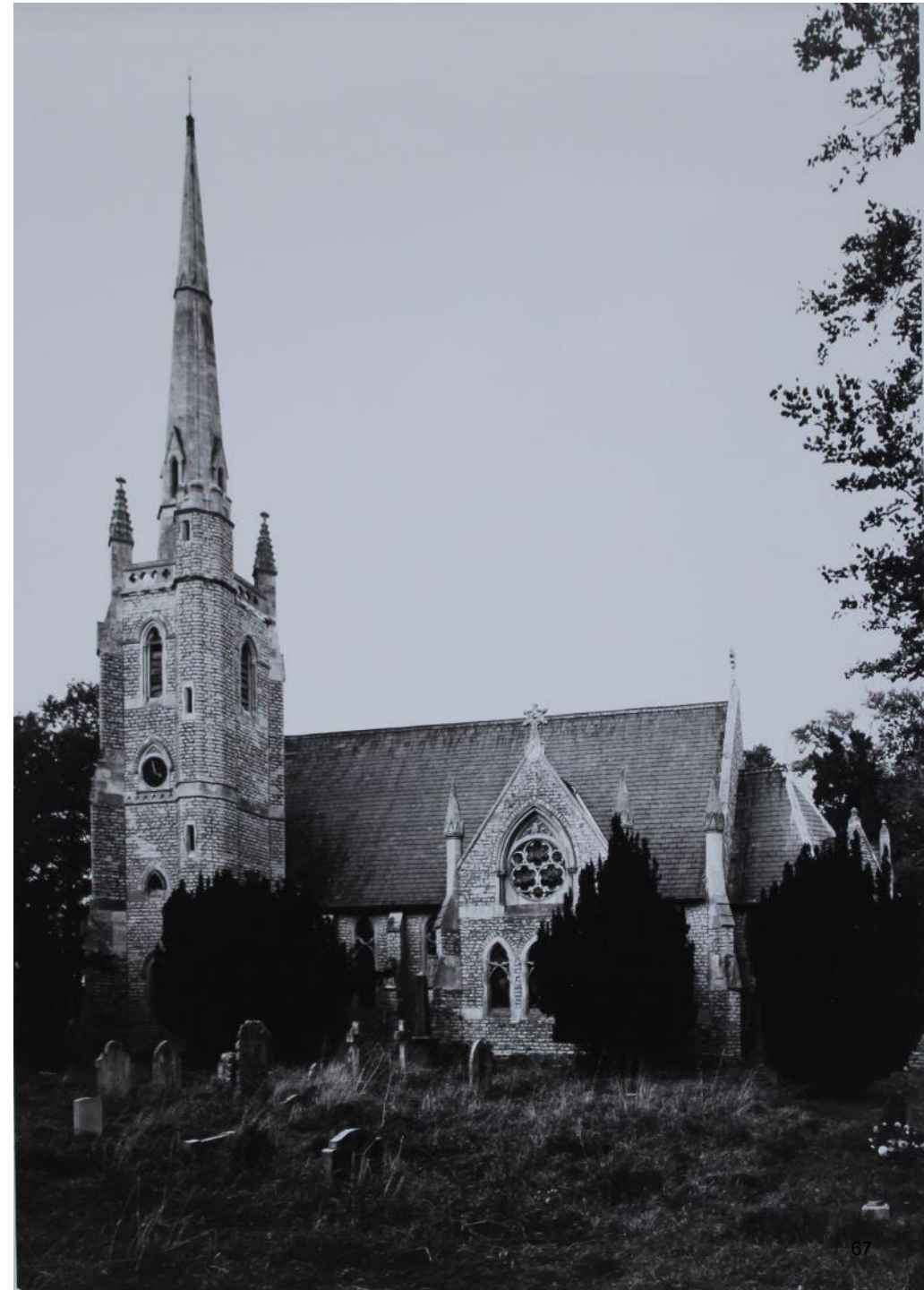
Viability

This probably is viable, subject to available parking. Increasing the number of units and removing the liability of the roof would reduce the cost per unit as well as one of the more difficult ongoing maintenance costs.

Example 3 - Umberslade Baptist Chapel

Overview

Building type/style	Decorated gothic church with spire
Faith	Non-conformist (Baptists) estate chapel
Status	Closed. Looked after by the Historic Chapels Trust (vested 1999) and volunteer friends. Future currently under consideration, including possible sale
Location	Rural setting in Warwickshire, but not remote. Affluent area.
Age	Built 1877
Listing	II*
Brief history	The church was built by a prominent local industrialist and Baptist convert on the family estate, both to serve the needs of the Estate but also to spread the faith in the village. A separate timber chapel/schoolroom within the curtilage is also Grade II* listed
Issues	£1.3m repair cost (£400k about to be spent by the owner) Strange location - no passing footfall, but affluent area Very limited public transport accessibility Distant motorway noise Graves including war memorial
Positives	Reasonable value area Pleasant immediate setting Good looking building



Listing and Significance

Level of listing
(Grade II, II*, I)

Listing particulars – Reasons for Designation

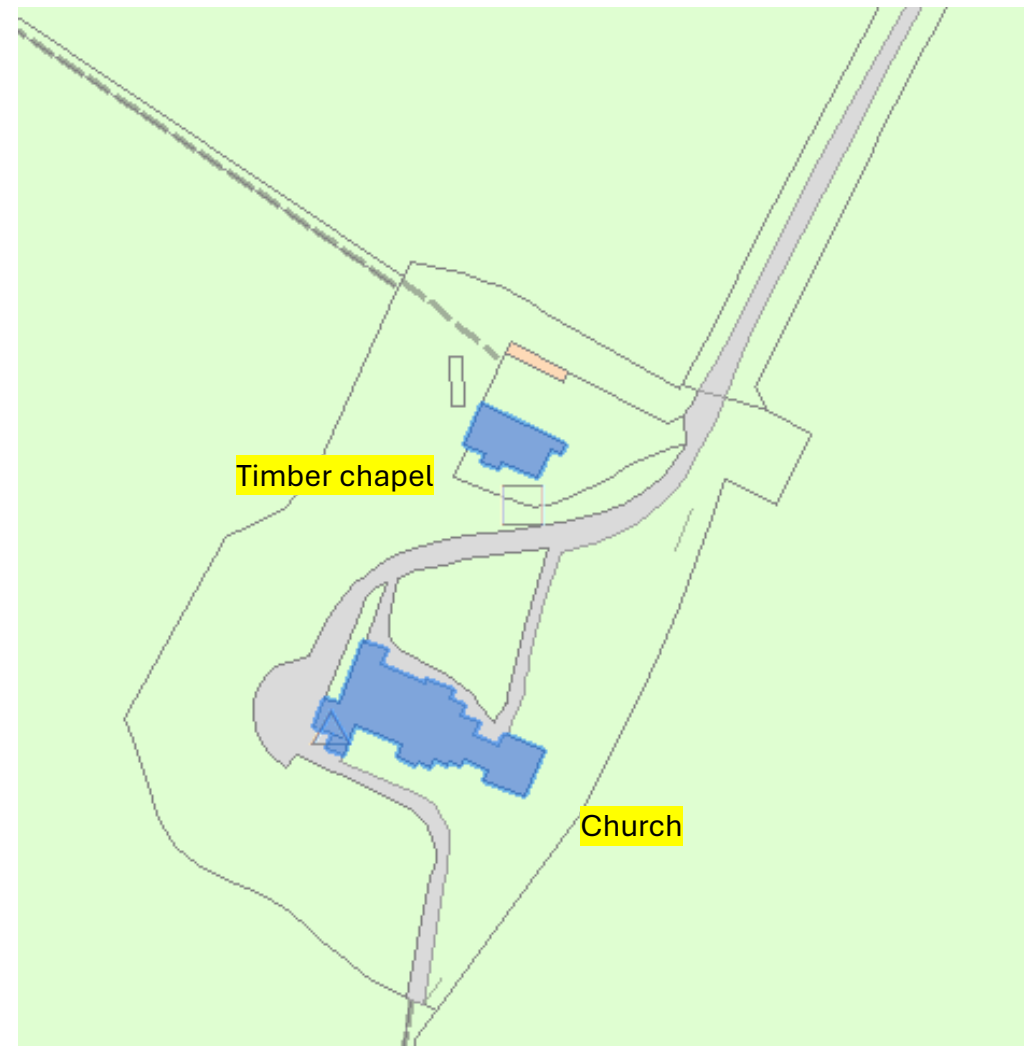
Christ Church, a Baptist Church built in 1877 by George Ingall for GF Muntz Jnr of Umberslade Hall, with an associated timber church, is listed at Grade II*, for the following principal reasons:

- Architectural interest: the church is an impressive example, in Gothic style, of a non-conformist chapel, by George Ingall, a recognised architect of non-conformist chapels in the region;
- Rarity: its design, as an exuberant Victorian Gothic church, is relatively rare for a Baptist chapel, which are traditionally simpler, and mainly Classical in inspiration during the C19;
- Interior: the interior is richly appointed, with good quality carvings and fittings, stained glass and a particularly good open baptistery with marble balustrade;
- Intactness: the interior retains much of its original suite of well-made furnishings, and a rare carillon clock by Gillett and Bland (later Gillet and Johnston), makers of carillon clocks of international reputation
- Group value: between the temporary timber church and the current building, and the war memorial in the burial ground, which is separately listed at Grade II.

The special interior will limit options for reuse. This is typical of non-conformist churches and chapels whose significance is often their interiors and rarity. The 'intactness' of the interior likewise may restrict options.



No individual significance is attributed to the timber chapel, however it receives Grade II* listing as a result of the 'group value' with the church.



Grade II* is a high level of listing and will restrict options along with the significance of elements of the interior.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Condition

Condition



A detailed condition report was done in 2021, from which these photographs are taken. A cost report was also prepared which showed total repairs of £1.3m. The HCT has done two phases of repair works, including a £500,000 phase in 2025 which re-roofed the timber chapel, and stabilised all the structures, but there remains c. £400,000 of repair works needed. For this reason, the Chapel is considered to be in Poor condition for the purposes of the Framework.

Planners

Local planning
authority
approach



Stratford-on-Avon District Council is a medium sized planning authority, responsible for a lot of listed buildings. The Conservation Officer is directly employed and is an architect by training. The repair work to the buildings has been covered by two separate listed building applications and hence the planners have current experience of the site, and the need to find a use for the buildings.

This suggests a neutral position from planners, who will consider any applications in line with the NPPF.

Denomination

Denomination
Protestant,
Catholic,
Non-conformist

This is a Baptist church, and as such falls under the categorisation on non-conformist. It was built by a wealthy landowner on his own land. When it was closed it came under the care of the Historic Chapels Trust which looks after non-conformist chapels.

Key features of the interior are the pulpit and the baptistry pool, which are highly significant and related to this particular non-conformist use.



The Framework designation of non-conformist will make sub-division of the interior more difficult, especially as these features are quite central in the space.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Size

Size



Umberslade Baptist Chapel was a statement building, probably larger than it needed to be but George Muntz, who built it on his estate, was a wealthy industrialist and this was an expression of his success. He was a convert to the Baptist faith and wanted to promote his beliefs to the local community.

<https://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/article/umberslade-baptist-church>



The timber chapel (above) was built as a temporary chapel while the main Chapel was built. It is of large domestic scale.



The church is very open with no subdivision or internal columns. There is plenty of light and very little stained glass. The space is dominated by the pulpit, with unusual baptistry pool in front.

For the purposes of the Framework, this Chapel is considered to be of Medium size. This rationalises well in terms of a residential conversion – it would be very big for a single dwelling, and if subdivided would not be more than about four units. The vestry (above left) and timber chapel give scope for adding in more floorspace for main or ancillary uses.

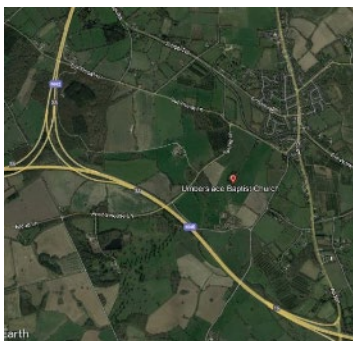
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Location

Location
(Rural, Urban,
City)



Umberslade is in the Midlands county of Warwickshire, just outside the M42 orbital motorway around Birmingham, on the route towards Warwick immediately, and then Oxford and London. It has easy access to the M40 and M42, 10 minutes from the centre of Solihull, and as such is close to centres of population and employment.



Access is down a 500m driveway, a public right of way which would have been the villagers' route to church. The curtilage of the site is approximately the area shown covered in trees below, many of the trees having been planted at the time of the building of the church in 1877.

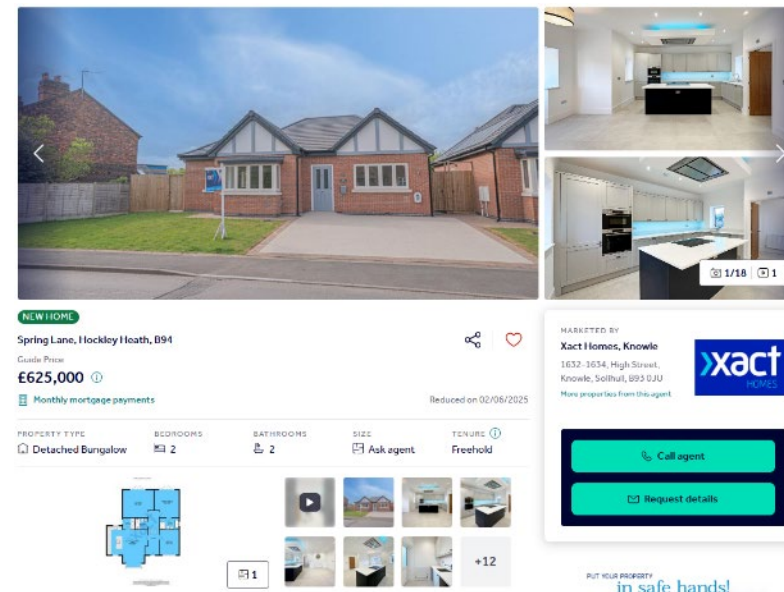
The surrounding fields are still in the ownership of the Muntz family and are farmed. This is in the Green Belt which could prevent over-development.

For the purposes of the Framework this church has both urban and rural characteristics. It does not benefit from passing footfall but is accessible. It is going to be classed as a cautious 'Urban'.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Values

Local values
(residential or
commercial)



Residential values are high in the villages around Solihull. This example in neighbouring Hockley Heath near the church is being marketed at an equivalent of £5600/m² which gives lots of scope for a viable residential scheme. There is a small commercial scheme in Hockley Heath quoting £17psf for offices, so a single office might be possible.

For the purposes of the Framework the values will be considered High, not presenting a barrier to any sort of uses.

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Framework Summary

The final stage of the application of the Framework is to amalgamate all the individual assessments and identify which end use types are still viable. This is done in the table below.

APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK TO UMBERSLADE BAPTIST CHAPEL

LISTING
CONDITION
PLANNERS
DENOMINATION
SIZE
LOCATION
VALUES

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B

OVERALL

RES-A	RES-B	RES-C	CML-A	CML-B	CML-C	REC-A	REC-B	CTY-A	CTY-B	WOR-A	WOR-B
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Conclusion

High density residential or commercial use has been ruled out. This is principally due to the significance of the interior. A podded scheme could work. Eight options are shown as amber which means they would be possible, but might be quite difficult, need grant, etc. There are no green options, meaning this Chapel will be a challenging project, and may need grant.

REC-A

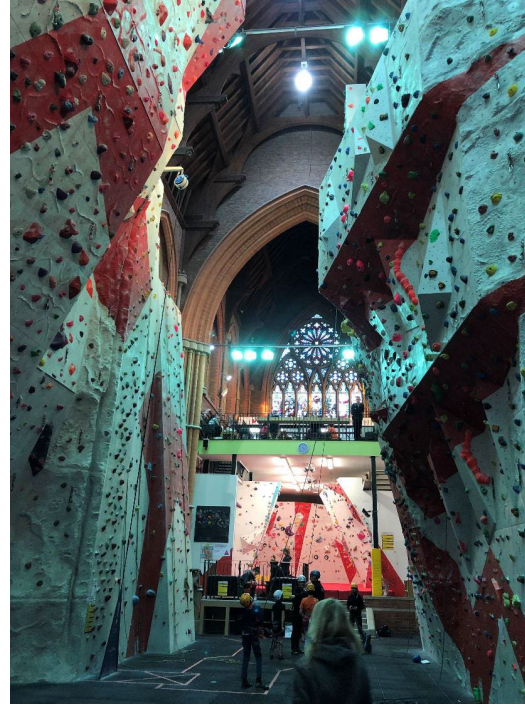
and

RES-B

Precedents



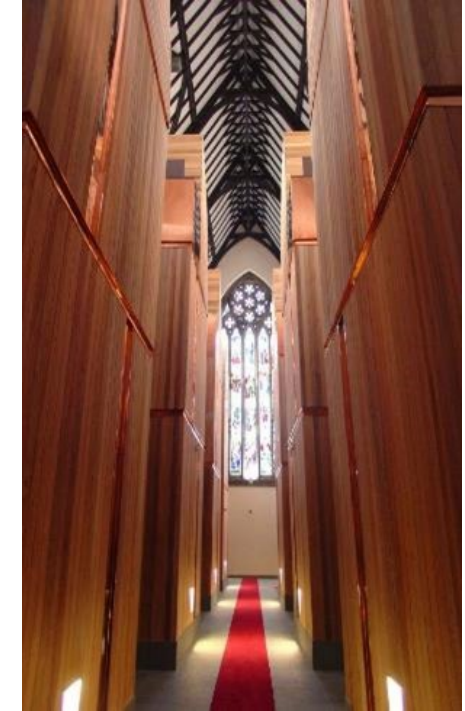
*The Mount Without, Bristol
Event space and wedding venue*



Manchester Climbing Centre

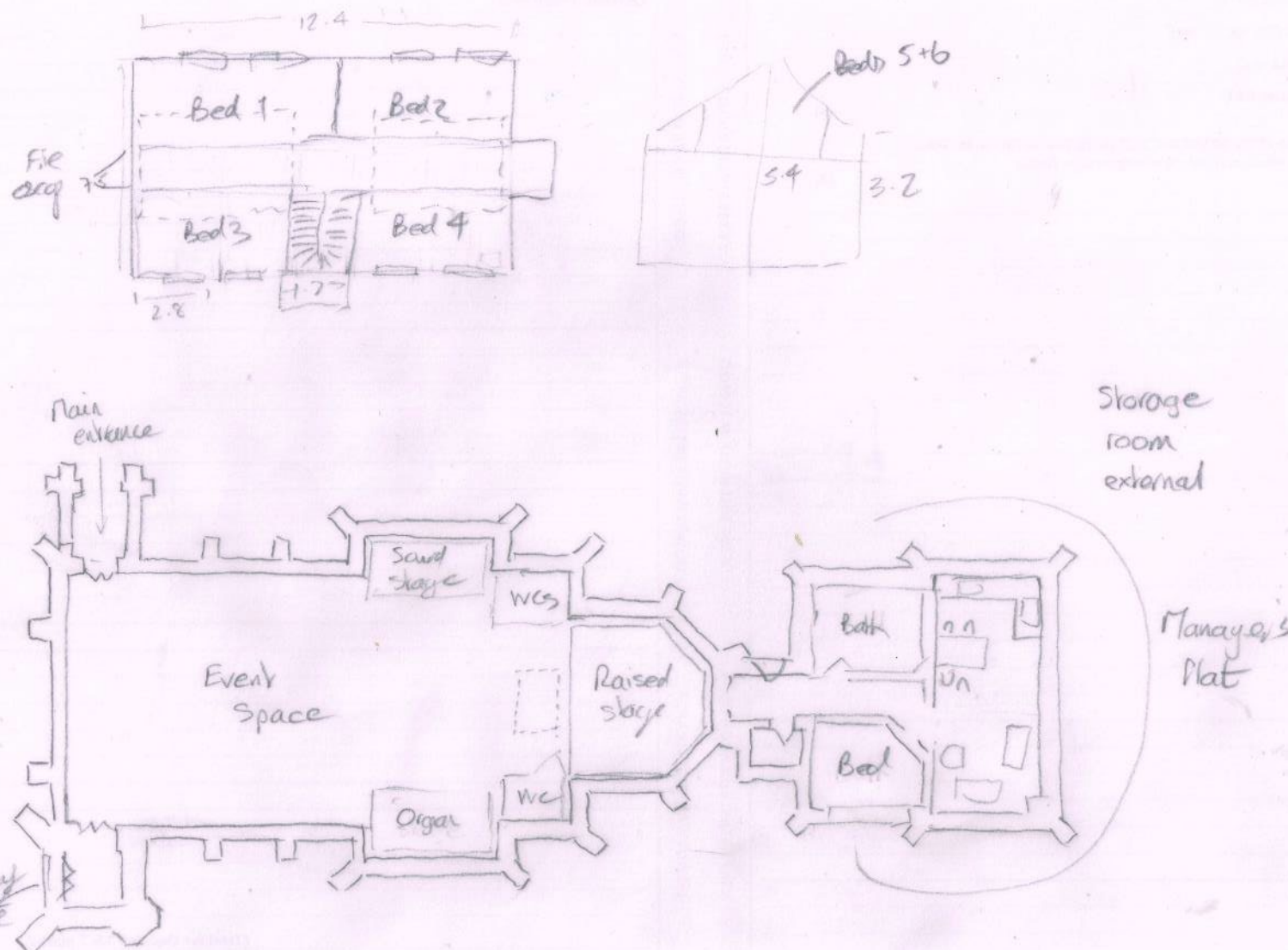


*Community use not retaining worship. Large volume
could support some sort of sport/recreational use.*



*St Mary's Hulme
Insertion of residential pods*

Option 1 - **REC-A** Events complex



The scheme would consist of three elements:

1. The multi-purpose event space in the church, adapted only to add staging, toilets, lighting, sound system etc
2. A Manager's flat created from the vestries
3. Six double bedrooms for overnight accommodation in the timber chapel, arranged over two floors

The main body of the church has little intervention. The pulpit would need to be removed in order to insert a staging area at the east end. The baptistry pool would be retained but covered over.

The organ can remain and be usable. At the opposite side would be a sound stage – those two sources of music flanking the open events space.

Toilets can fit in the corners by the stage rather than interrupting the main space. An alternative would be to put in vestries but that may be a waste and it is not easily accessible.

Main entrance would be the current main door and the tower entrance can provide secondary means of escape.

Option 1 - **REC-A** Events complex - viability

Development Appraisal				Assumption	
Church Conversion, Umberslade				event space income more than covers running costs	
Number of units	2 plus the church			can provide an income for the person who looks after it	
				it will need a sinking fund for ongoing maintenance	
Site acquisition costs			£10,000	0.51%	
a Cost of site		£0			
b Acquisition fees					
c Legal fees		£10,000		Adjusted down	
d Compensation					
e SDLT					
Construction costs - base event space			£1,519,096	78.04%	
a Driveway		£50,000		Clean it, patch it and install bollard lighting	
b Exceptional repair costs					
Church		£425,521			
Timber chapel		£160,500			
Vestry		£21,375			
c Incoming services and drainage		£174,000		QS estimate	
b Building works		£592,000		Build contingency needs to cover sundry non measured items at this stage	
Landscaping and external works		£90,700		Allowed 25k for moving headstones and removing trees	
c Warranty		£5,000			
Fees			£150,168	7.71%	No substantial new foundations
a Design control		£50,000			
b QS	1.50%	£22,786		1.5% of building work	
c Modeling					
d Additional design and surveys		£40,000		Further drawings for delivery etc	
e Service enquiries	2.00%	£30,382			
f Project Management		£0			
g Planning consent		£7,000		Includes £1,000 Pre app	
h Section agreement costs/CIL		£0		Won't be one	
Finance			£91,146	4.68%	
Development Contingency	10.00%		£176,041	9.04%	
NETT DEVELOPMENT COST			£1,946,451	100.00%	
SALE VALUE			£2,400,000		This is the value the business would need to achieve to be viable
Nett Development Margin		23.30%	£453,549		

Notes

The exceptional repair costs have been taken from a recent report prepared by quantity surveyors on behalf of the owner, but have been adjusted to strip out costs which would not need to be done for these uses. Chapel and vestry have been costed at £2,000/m2 in addition to the residual exceptional repairs. Cost of bring services into the site is significant - £174k is a QS estimate (which looks high).

Although a finance cost at 6% has been included, in reality this would not be easy to finance as there is no security value in the site.

So it is viable?

Maybe, but it depends on whether the business can be managed to generate net income of circa £250,000 to justify spending nearly £2m on creating it. If the site did 20 weddings a year at £10,000 each that would generate £200,000. Add on some parties, concerts etc, and the fact that the manager gets to live in a home worth around £500,000, and there might just be a market for it.

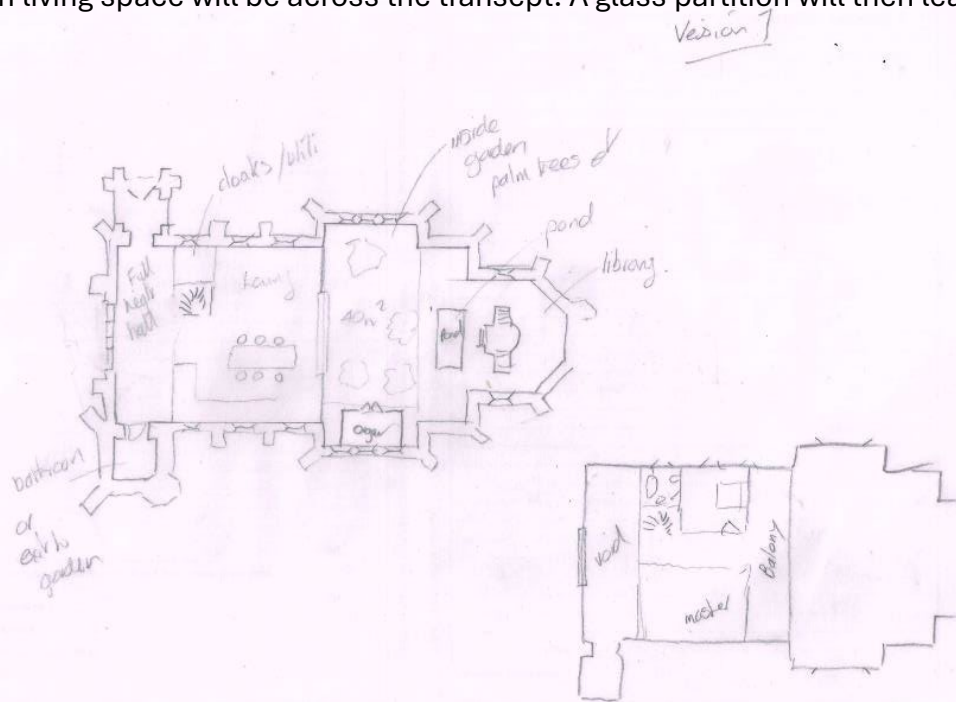
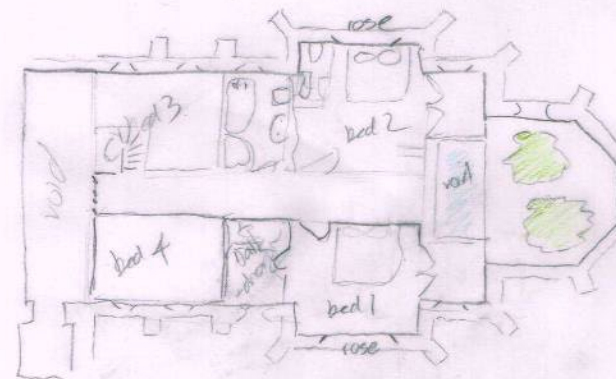
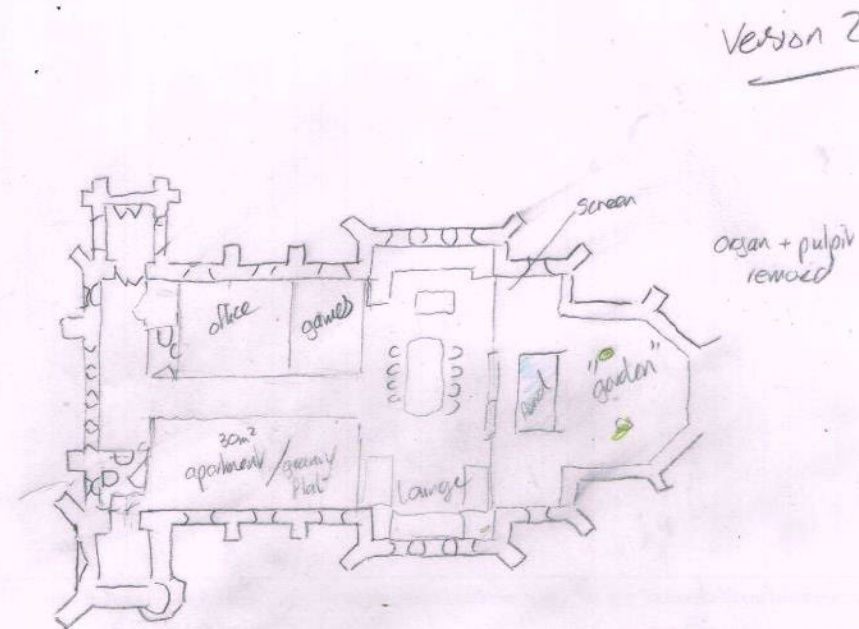
Option 2 – RES-B Single dwelling insertion

The church is large for a single dwelling, although large houses in this area could be £400-500m2. The proposal is therefore more of a RES-B proposal in inserting a significant scale of building within the space while trying to retain the sense of the overall volume.

Both these options therefore allow for the east end with the baptistry and pulpit to be an internal 'winter garden'. That area would appear to have the most significant and so leaving this untouched, and potentially still available to be seen by the public on occasion, would help with the planning argument.

Version 2 (right) seems better. A separate 'granny annexe' is carved out on the ground floor using the tower entrance. A full height central corridor will maintain the view through the building, and the main living space will be across the transept. A glass partition will then lead into the garden.

Estimate that this dwelling would be between £1.25m and £1.5m. 'Granny annexe' and optional vestry extension in addition.



RES-B

Renders generated by Czero Developments from my designs to illustrate how I would take the design forward in practice. This page is not intended to form part of the assessed submission and is included for illustrative purposes only.



One idea that has come from seeing these 3D renders is that the roof of area above the pulpit, which is the 'winter garden' in this design, could be replaced with glazing. This would make it a much more successful garden and be a dramatic intervention into the building envelope.



Option 2 – Single dwelling - viability

Development Appraisal					
Church Conversion, Umberslade					
Number of units	1				
			Total		
Site acquisition costs			£10,000	0.82%	
a Cost of site		£0			
b Acquisition fees					
c Legal fees		£10,000			Adjusted down
d Compensation					
e SDLT					
Construction costs			£929,233	76.58%	
a Driveway		£20,000			Just clean
b Exceptional repair costs		£131,033			Mostly pointing and masonry -nothing internal
c Incoming services and drainage		£174,000			
d Building works		£538,000			Build contingency needs to cover sundry non measured items at this stag
e Landscaping and external works		£63,700			Tree work, handstanding, garden
f Warranty		£2,500			
Fees			£116,693	9.62%	
a Design - architect	4.00%	£37,169			
b QS	1.50%	£13,939			1.5% of building work
c Modeling					
d Additional design services and surveys		£40,000			Further drawings for delivery etc
e Service enquiries					
f Project Management	2.00%	£18,585			
g Planning consent		£7,000			Includes £1,000 Pre app
h Section agreement costs/CIL		£0			Won't be one
Finance			£42,000	3.46%	Done on basis of a self build mortgage
Development Contingency	10.00%		£92,923	7.66%	
Sales and Marketing costs			£22,597	1.86%	
a Marketing		£2,500			General collateral production
b Agent	1.25%	£18,097			
c Legals	2000	£2,000			
NETT DEVELOPMENT COST			£1,213,446	100.00%	
SALE VALUE			£1,447,758		
Nett Development Margin			19.31%		£234,312

Notes

The new build within the body of the church is 269m2 and has been priced at £2,000 / m2

As with Option 1, this would be extremely difficult to finance without substantial equity but the site could easily be sold with the benefit of planning to a self builder or developer.

So it is viable?

Yes, but probably a bit tight on development margin given uncertainty on the sales value of a unique property. This scheme has not done anything to the timber chapel or the vestry other than the conservation repairs being funded by the current owner, so there is more value in the site than this, and with the timber chapel there is scope to sweeten the planning case by providing something for community use.

Option 2a – RES-B – vestry extension

The vestry currently has a net internal area of 60 m². This is turned into a home of approximately 120 m² with an extension onto the south side, and a rooftop extension.

The extension to the south, which would contain main lounge areas with French windows onto the garden, is shown in ashlar as a contemporary take on the current vestry design, but without ornament.

The roof extension is shown clad in Corten steel to show a clear contrast to the existing, and would then have French windows to the south and west elevations to give access onto roof terraces as shown below.



Although the area in which the extension would be positioned appears heavily wooded, a recent arboricultural report does not show any trees with Tree Protection Orders.

Conclusion and future

This work has created a viable Framework which identifies potentially viable and deliverable outcomes for particular church buildings based on various characteristics of that church.

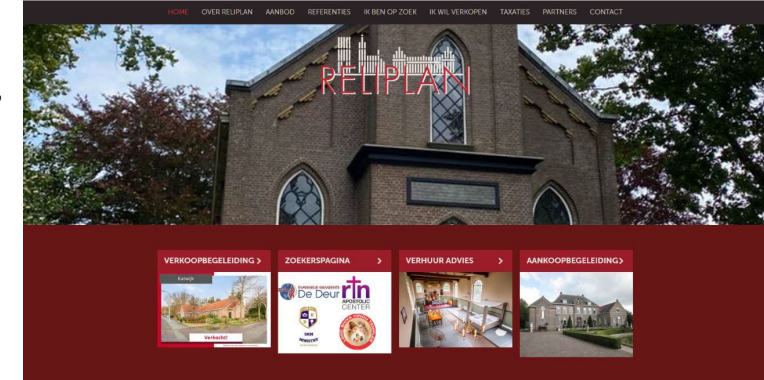
This is a tool that could be used by all the stakeholders considering the future of a church – the Diocese, the planners, the architect, and the developer. It is in all their interests to make sure time is not wasted pursuing unviable options, because that is time that these buildings do not have.

This sort of Framework could be applicable to any adaptive use project, but the church is a special building with more different adaptation drivers than other building types. It is also a building type where there is a particular issue in terms of the number of such building potentially coming forward over the next 10 years, with complexities over their disposal and attitudes to their reuse.

Based on discussions with other practitioners in this field, there are a number things which could now be done to refine this model:

- Each of the Outcome Ribbons needs to be peer reviewed and finessed
- There needs to be some consideration of the economic value of certain uses to make sure they can actually deliver an economically sustainable future
- There needs to be some sort of qualitative assessment of whether a building is worth the effort
- The process needs to be turned into a computer software model

In my Dissertation research I interviewed Arjan van de Ruit, founder and Director of Reliplan, a business in The Netherlands that goes beyond the role of the traditional agent by acting both for sellers and purchasers of churches, including running planning in certain instances, and helping purchasers navigate the complexity of adaptation.



I concluded that this is a business that does not exist in the United Kingdom. Here we have approximately 50 Dioceses, all with a Diocesan Secretary whose job it is to deal with disposals, who have to find an agent with the motivation and expertise to market a church, who then just puts it on RightMove and sits back and waits. Meanwhile the Diocese retains the cost of insurance, and tries to manage the slow deterioration of the asset. In many cases considerable time is wasted pursuing unviable options, especially on behalf of well-meaning community groups.

The Total Addressable Market for closed churches over the next years is considerable. There is one Diocese that expects to shut 40% of its buildings. This Framework could be developed and used by a business like Reliplan, but combined with an additional revenue stream of actually developing some of the buildings.

I discussed such a business with Diana Evans, Head of Churches and Cathedrals for Historic England, at the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance Conference in May 2025, and she said “Well, if anyone can do that, it’s you.”

I might just do it.