

# Heritage Impact Assessment

St Andrews, Rodney Street.

## Introduction

The application site consists of the site of the former St. Andrew's Church of Scotland (Grade II\* Listed) on the eastern side of Rodney Street on the northern side of its junction with Maryland Street within Liverpool city centre. The site has a long planning history having been the subject of various schemes, none of which has come to fruition. The long term effects of the lack of a reasonably beneficial use, combined with subsequent owners complicit neglect was accelerated by a disastrous fire in 1983. Ultimately, this led to buildings condition becoming significantly worse and prompted the City Council exercise its compulsory purchase powers to acquire ownership. While ownership is now resolved the building remains a vacant shell and its condition greatly detracts from the setting of the Rodney Street Conservation Area, in which it is situated. Its listed status and its parlous condition has also resulted in its inclusion on the List of Buildings at Risk drawn up by English Heritage. The current proposal involves the retention and restoration of the remaining external walls of the principal church building and the construction of an internal steel frame to support five floors of student accommodation around an open central courtyard.

## Description of the Heritage Asset

St Andrew's Church was built for Scottish Presbyterians in 1823-24 and is one of the few surviving works by the renowned Liverpool architect John Foster Jun (c.1787-1846).

Of principal architectural interest at St Andrew's is the fine entrance frontage to Rodney Street. This presents a recessed portico of giant Ionic columns. The flanking bays are crowned by domed cupolas or lanterns with Corinthian aedicules carrying a pediment to each face. The Ionic columns and antae are replete with splendid 'Asiatic' bases. They appear to have been derived from the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of ancient world although virtually nothing survives today.

The articulation of St Andrew's showpiece portico provides the key to the architect's early life and formative experience. After his time as a draughtsman in Jeffrey Wyatt's London practice, John Foster Jnr spent the years between 1809 and 1816 foraging among archaeological finds in the Mediterranean, following in the footsteps of James Stuart, Nicholas Revett and Robert Adam. Judging by the exceptional quality of the details exhibited at St Andrew's church Foster applied his knowledge and experience of Classical antiquity to good effect. Later in life Foster succeeded his father, John Foster Senior, as Corporation Surveyor in 1824, a post he held until 1835.

The north tower of the front portico section was demolished in 1983 following a severe fire though the replacement of this crucial feature is central to the restoration proposed as party of this application. The surviving tower contains delicate plasterwork and the ceilings to the domes were originally coffered in a classical manner reminiscent of Rome's Pantheon.

The building is a fine example of its type and period, though the sophisticated entrance portico belies the simplicity of the body of the church which falls squarely into the category of Calvinist 'prattling box'. The interior was engineered to accommodate the maximum number of souls with vast arrays of pews arranged along deep galleries to three sides of the interior space as well the main floor area. All the seating was orientated towards the pulpit which stood against the centre of the east wall, the position usually taken by the altar in Christian places of worship. It is significant to note that this area of the church, was designed by the congregation's Committee of Management and their surveyor, Daniel Stewart and was not directly influenced by Foster.

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The lack of proper maintenance and serious neglect over several decades, together with the consequences of the fire in 1983, has resulted in the loss of one of the front towers and some of the other associated architectural details plus the loss of the complete interior. The building now consists of the front portico along with the remaining original external walls which enclose an open central space. It is listed as Grade II\* although the description indicates it is a distinguished building in a desperate condition. However, the buildings location on a prominent corner site within its own generous open space, which was used mainly as a grave yard, with a building line behind that of the neighbouring properties along Rodney Street allows the church to retain its striking aspect in the street scene enriching the visual appearance of the conservation area.

The grounds of the church also include the Sunday School by H.H. Vale. Built in 1872 the Italianate building is connected to the north east corner of the church by a corridor link. The whole is integrated through the use of round arched openings with moulded architraves. The arrangement is simple but attractive and serves to complement the church's classical character. This structure is listed as Grade II in its own right and is unfortunately in as perilous a condition as the adjacent church.

The surrounding yard is flat and was formerly used as a grave yard with some interesting features still remaining, in particular the pyramid on the southern side of the church which is the tomb for William Mackenzie and is also listed Grade II. Mackenzie was the Scottish railway contractor responsible for the Edge Hill–Lime Street cutting and tunnels and his miniature mausoleum of 1868 takes the form of a plain granite pyramid. Mackenzie established an international engineering practice as a builder of railways realising a considerable fortune during his lifetime.

Rodney Street was first established shortly after Lord Rodney's 1782 naval victory over the Comte de Grasse and was one of the earliest and largest of the new residential areas springing up on the outskirts of the city at that time. After a slow start, building was rapid in the last years of the 18th century as the wealthy merchants moved away from the increasing urban pressures on their houses in Hanover Street and Duke Street. By 1807 it appears that most of the street had been developed and its line was extended northwards along Clarence Street, Russell Street and Seymour Street towards St. Anne's Street. During the 20th century, Rodney Street was the centre of the professional elite in the city and still retains a high proportion of medical, legal and professional consultancies; the number of more general office uses has increased in recent years although a good proportion of the buildings are still in high quality private residential use.

The front boundary of the site is enclosed by a 1.2 metre high iron railings above a stone plinth, independently listed Grade II, providing an open aspect to the church building. The original cast iron gates and railings have been replaced, however, the moulded stone piers and plinths are original. The sides of the piers have recessed panels with moulded reveals and the cap stones are pedimented to each face, echoing the aedicules of the two towers. The other side and rear boundaries consist of plain 2 metre high brick walls. The rear boundary backs directly on to the John Moores University campus accessed primarily from Maryland Street which forms the southern boundary to the church.

The history of St Andrew's Church evidences the close religious and socio-economic ties that were forged during the early 19th Century between North West England and Scotland, particularly within the thriving middle class populations of Liverpool and Glasgow. The burgeoning business community of early 19th Century Glasgow drew heavily on the model established in Liverpool during the 18th Century for aspiring mercantile port cities throughout the proto-industrial world.

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Large numbers of Scottish merchants, engineers, architects and associated business professionals migrated to Liverpool during this period, seeking unprecedented returns for daring entrepreneurship. By the 1820s the community was both distinct and well established enough to commission its own particular place of worship. The confidence, wealth and aspiration of the Scottish community is attested by the fact that the church's 'public face' was designed by the Corporation Surveyor in the then fashionable Greco-Roman revival style.

## Assessment of Significance

In assessing the significance of the building and site we have endeavoured to apply current best practice principles by considering the issue of importance against the guidance now contained in the recent English Heritage 'Conservation Principles' initiative. It accepts that people value historic places in many different ways. The document attempts to rationalise the way 'value' is assessed by using four primary categories:

Heritage value can be found in:

- The potential a place has to tell us more about the past (**Evidential Value**),
- The power which a place has to connect us with an aspect of the past (**Historical Value**).
- The way people react to being in an historic place is another type of heritage value (**Aesthetic Value**),
- The way they bring people and communities together (**Communal Value**).

Allied to this, the concept of significance is essentially hierarchical, using descending levels of value. These follow guidelines established by James Semple Kerr (*The Conservation Plan*, 1996), which have been adopted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and others. The accepted levels of significance are:

- **Exceptional** - important at national to international levels, reflected in the statutory designations of scheduled monuments, grade I and II\* listed buildings and equivalent nationally designated sites. (including those of ecological and nature conservation value).
- **Considerable** - important at regional level or sometimes higher, e.g. grade II listed buildings.
- **Some** – of local to regional significance, often for group value, e.g. a building which makes a positive contribution to a designated conservation area.
- **Little** – of limited heritage or other value.
- **Negative or intrusive** features, i.e. those that actually detract from the value of a site, for example a modern corrugated iron shed adjacent to an important medieval building.

In relation to the listed structures on the site we would define their significance as follows:

**The Church – Exceptional**

**The Sunday School – Considerable**

**The McKenzie Monument – Considerable**

**The Boundary Railings/Stonework - Considerable**

It is also relevant to consider the site as a whole against the criteria above. It is clear that the site plays a very important part in defining the character and quality of this part of the Conservation Area and Rodney Street in particular. Accordingly, it is considered to be of **considerable aesthetic value**. Allied to this the historical importance of the site must also be viewed as of **considerable evidential/historical value**. Finally, it is clear the building is held in high regard by those who live and work in the city and there is a clear mandate to bring the structure back into beneficial use. Accordingly we must attribute the site with **considerable communal value**.

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## The Proposals

In essence the current proposal is for the insertion of a new independent structure within the restored shell of the remaining fabric of the church. This will entail the construction of an internal steel frame within the existing external walls of the former church. This frame will act as a lateral restraint to those walls, allowing the existing shell to remain intact. The proposed floors will consist of permanent shuttered concrete which will provide an excellent lateral restraint to the restored extant shell as well as allowing good fire and sound separation between each floor.

There will be no new openings created with the scheme using the existing to provide the necessary access and lighting to the new accommodation. Behind each of the window openings in the side elevation, there will be new angled glazing to the student rooms with each opening providing light and ventilation to two rooms. The void that is created between the existing openings and the new window faces will be a full height void to the top of the restored existing walls. These will be left exposed with a suitable lead flashing at the top, details of which will be agreed with the Council and English Heritage.

The top floor will be of a light penthouse design with glazing to the full height and width of each room that will be seen above the top walls. However, it will be set back from the existing facade by 1.5 metres which will also allow private terrace space for the occupiers of that floor.

The new block will be built around an internal enclosed courtyard, which will extend to the full height of the building. Although each room will have its main windows facing outwards through the existing openings, they will be accessed from a communal internal balcony around the courtyard space. The courtyard will be hard surfaced and landscaped to provide private amenity space and will contain a communal lounge/dining area and gymnasium with each floor above having two communal lounges. The internal courtyard will be a vibrant area with all access to rooms via either staircases or a lift which will serve the individual decks.

The proposal will provide a total of 100 student rooms on five floors with ten rooms along each side wall using the existing openings to provide light to two rooms. Each room will have its own en-suite shower and toilet facilities as well as space for a bed, desk and chair and storage space. Each floor will include communal lounges with kitchen/dining facilities; there will be two on each of the upper floors with the ground floor containing one and a gymnasium with office accommodation for management purposes. As part of the adaptation of the church building, restoration work will be carried out with a view to a full reinstatement of the external shell. This will include the provision of a new tower and the restoration of the other matching one on the front elevation and the making good of the balustrade at roof level. The side arched window openings will remain as they are since they provide the source of light to the proposed new rooms. Similarly, the roof will not be reinstated to its original design as a new roof structure is proposed that will take account of the height and configuration of the new residential element.

The Sunday School building will have its external walls repaired and lime rendered to replicate its original appearance. Replacement period doors and windows will be installed with a newly constructed low pitched roof to ensure that the building is water tight. Its interior will remain as existing with a portal type steel frame being installed to provide suitable support for the restored structure including all necessary lateral bracing for the distorted exterior walls. It will remain as an empty shell until a sustainable new use can be found.

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It is considered that the proposed use of accommodation for students is suitable in this location being close to a number of higher education facilities within and on the fringe of the city centre which are within easy walking or cycling distance. It also makes the most efficient and beneficial use of a vacant listed building on a prominent road frontage within a Conservation Area. The building has been seen as a problem for many years with a long and troubled planning history which ultimately led to the Council seeking compulsory purchase powers to gain ownership in order to ensure that it was not only retained but put to a sustainable, viable end use.

The applicant has carried out a number of schemes for similar student accommodation in the city in the last two years (Princes Road, Duke Street, Bold Street and a recent approval for the former Fire Station at Hatton Garden) and has the necessary financial backing to implement this proposal. He has a proven record of delivering this type of accommodation with standards that are acceptable to the local authority and popular with the students. It is felt that if this particular scheme is approved there is a very good probability that it will be completed quickly thus providing high quality accommodation for students and representing a significant improvement to the visual appearance of the area. It will also result in the positive re-use of a building that is currently on the list of those at risk and allowing resources to be taken forward to support other buildings at risk. The innovative proposal will represent a significant step forward for the city as a whole, indicating its ability to deliver such schemes and make a positive contribute to its standing in maintaining its stock of listed building and putting them to modern and economically viable alternative uses.

### **Heritage Impact Assessment.**

As previously stated, in essence the current proposal is for the insertion of a new independent structure within the restored shell of the remaining fabric of the church. The underlying principle behind the scheme has been the recognition to respect the integrity of the existing building and to retain and restore a Grade II\* listed building within a conservation area while maximising the space within the existing structure. It is accepted that the remnants of the building are currently in a very poor condition but that they are now, at least secure, and that proposals can be brought forward to bring back beneficial use. It is recognised that any new works have to be contained within the existing shell whilst the external walls can be restored to their former condition. The scheme, therefore, has to achieve its maximum potential within a clearly delineated boundary; as there is no interior left of the original building, an innovative design has been prepared to provide purposely designed student accommodation on five floors. Each floor is rectangular in shape with a hollow centre which provides a central open courtyard which contains an enclosed amenity space for the future occupiers together with communal facilities.

The scale and massing, therefore, will be very similar to the original. It will differ in that the original roof which was lost following a fire in 1984 will not be restored but it will be replaced by a new roof, mono pitched towards the centre of the building. This will result in a glazed wall above existing walls but its simple straight lines and light materials will complement the existing horizontal elements of the upper floors. The front part of the upper wall will be visible between the towers (one of which is to be rebuilt to return the front elevation to its former design) and will be subservient to them thus not increasing the overall height of the building or its massing. The exact materials to be used will be agreed with the local planning authority but it is proposed to use modern materials that will blend with the original in both colour and texture.

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The proposed scheme does not involve the demolition of any part of the extant structure but rather its complete restoration with a view to returning its external appearance to its original condition. This will be completed in accordance with current conservation best practice and will employ materials and methods suitable for the retention of the primary remaining fabric. This will include:

- Masonry repairs and reinstatement to fully restore the stone portico frontage
- Repair and renewal of roof finishes and flashings to the portico frontage
- Masonry repairs and lime rendering to the rear section of the church
- Stabilisation and protection of the wall heads to all areas
- Stabilisation and repair of the walls to the Sunday School

The intended new use will result in a full maintenance schedule being introduced that will safeguard the future of the existing structure thereby ensuring the listed building in an economically beneficial purpose.

The church building is set within a large open space that has been used in part as a graveyard with various monuments and tombs still remaining. It is proposed that this space be retained for its amenity value and will be subject to a general programme of repair and maintenance but intrinsically will remain in its present configuration. A number of small trees to the front of the Sunday School will be retained as they represent the only greenery along Rodney Street. It is not proposed to introduce any new substantive landscaping to the site as this may detract from the setting of the existing buildings although the internal courtyard will be hard landscaped for the use of the resident students.

It is clear that the proposed new works will have an effect on the listed structure but this will essentially be positive in the delivery of a long term sustainable end use which will contribute to the retention of the building as a an essential feature in the Conservation Area and townscape. All repairs and restoration will be carried out to the highest possible conservation standards whilst the proposed new interventions will clearly be legible as contemporary additions which respect the historic fabric. All junctions or interface areas where old an new touch will be considered lightly so that the dynamic between the original fabric and the contemporary can be expressed clearly. The new use will provide a vibrant viable life for the conserved original fabric delivering a positive beneficial use for the site and the Conservation Area which respects the history of the place. The proposed inevitably demands some change but any negative associated impact is greatly outweighed by the positive regeneration of the derelict listed building. The restored church of St Andrews will once again stand proudly in its grounds addressing the city, its people, its history and its future.

### Conclusion

It is the applicant's view that the proposal would complies fully with the Council's other regeneration projects in the City Centre and would be seen to complement developments across the city. The associated works of restoration and re-instatement to the external facades of the building will be in keeping with the original design elements of the building resulting in a significant improvement to its appearance both preserving and enhancing the character of the building itself and the Rodney Street Conservation Area. It will also represent a significant improvement to the amenity of local residents and other commercial occupiers. The proposal represents a viable opportunity to develop the site for a suitable use by a developer who has experience across the city of providing such accommodation in a variety of buildings some of which are also listed. It is concluded that the proposal complies with both national and local policies for the re-use of the derelict listed building and would not have adverse effect on the amenity of any adjoining residents or on any other redevelopment proposals within the city.

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