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1. INTRODUCTION

Townscape has been commissioned by Sutcliffe & Son to produce this heritage appraisal to support a planning application for conversion of Stamford Street Methodist Church.

Townscape is an independent built environment consultancy serving the public, private and community sector clients.

We specialise in all aspects of our historic environment and wider urban design. We are experienced heritage and conservation professionals having both direct experience of roles within Local Government and private practice and we work in the best interests of our clients.

Townscape’s conservation expertise and planning knowledge ensures that our professional judgment is based on experience and best practice. We can also draw on a range of other conservation specialists (Surveyors, engineers and craftsmen etc.) where required.

Our aim is to provide an informed interpretation of planning policies and procedures along with a thorough understanding of the heritage asset, and where necessary advise on alternative approaches or a mitigation strategy.

Our experience has shown that a specialist appraisal at an early stage helps to identify and manage potential risks and objections, allowing projects to proceed with greater certainty, saving both time and money and increasing the chances of obtaining a planning approval. Our fees are reasonable and we can provide a timely response to any enquiry.

Townscape are full members of the Institute of Historic Building conservation (IHBC), associate members of RTPI, CIOB. We are professional advisors to the North West Independent Methodist Church and sit on the Baptist Union (UK) Listed Buildings Panel.
2. SITE LOCATION

Stamford Street Methodist New Connexions church is located on Stamford Street, Ashton Under Lyne, and Greater Manchester.

The church is located at grid reference SJ9387298920.

The church makes a positive building within Ashton Under Lyne Town Centre and is within the Ashton Centre Conservation Area.
Fig 2; Ordnance Survey 1968, Stamford Street Methodist Church clearly identified.

3. PLANNING POLICIES – TAMESIDE UDP

Stamford Street Methodist Church is a listed building at grade II and located in Ashton Town Centre Conservation area (designated in 1978) The Church is considered as a key building within the conservation area.

The principal characteristics of the conservation area are:

- The grandiose grid iron layout and town plan
- The historic and medieval old town which includes a number of listed buildings
- The medieval, Georgian and Victorian buildings located within the layout.
- The long vista of St Peter’s Church
- The 1700’s Earl of Stamford and Warrington’s new town layout
- The attractive squares, including old square and the views and vistas prominent throughout
- The narrow avenues such as Market Avenue and Stamford Arcade between Stamford Street and Old Street remain particular monuments to the history and development of the town.

Stamford Street Methodist Church occupies a key site and is a positive building reinforcing and referencing the strong character of the conservation area.
4. THE METHODIST MOVEMENT

Methodism has its origins with John Wesley (1703 – 1791) who whilst a member of the established Anglican Church, both as a minister and missionary wished to reform the church. Wesley rejected the formal steeple churches and the formal worship sitting in silence. Wesley began preaching his message of method preaching up and down the country where he preached in private houses, ale houses or wherever he could find an open door.

The Methodist movement in particular preached to the poor or working class in the emerging industries, coal mining and cotton spinning. It is clear to see the number of Methodist chapels of all denominations in the Ashton Under Lyne, which is testament to this spread of new congregations.

John Wesley died in 1791 leaving behind a well-organised chain of religious societies served by local helpers and itinerant preachers. These existed throughout England and Wales with outcrops in Scotland and Ireland with a total membership of almost 100,000. The work had also spread overseas to America, parts of Africa and the West Indies.

This movement for evangelism was rapidly organising itself into a church in its own right. This radical breakaway from the Church of England had never really been desired by Wesley. But under pressure of circumstances, in ordaining men for the ministry, in ignoring the parish system of the Established Church and building preaching houses, Wesley had flouted the rules of the Church of England and so had himself made the break inevitable.

From the early days of his evangelism, John Wesley had organised his converts into local societies, which were then grouped into circuits and the whole set-up governed by an annual conference of all his preachers over which he presided. The first Conference was in 1744, not long after his own conversion in 1738. However, in 1784 Wesley had this conference legally constituted and recognised at law and it consisted of 100 preachers known as ‘The Legal Hundred.’ This was meant to ensure the sound continuance of the church after Wesley’s death.

The conference following John Wesley’s death decided that henceforth the Wesleyan Movement, or the Wesleyan Methodist Church as it was now regarding itself, should not be governed by one central autocratic figure, occupying Wesley’s shoes as it were, but by an annual conference presided over by a different minister each year. To facilitate administration between conferences, circuits were grouped into districts with regular committee meetings chaired by local pastors or ministers. This whole somewhat elaborate structure became known as the Methodist Connexion and has remained the general pattern of the Methodist Church right to this present day in the 21st century.

By the end of the nineteenth century many strands of Methodism were in decline. The failing fortunes of cotton and wool spinning in the Ashton did not help ailing congregations.

The many strands of Methodism preaching were brought together as the Methodist Union in 1932.
5. Methodism in Ashton Under Lyne

The growth in non-conformity and the vast variety of churches and sects, which emerged in the 19th century, left a remarkable architectural legacy in the industrial towns and cities of Britain, from the simple preaching house to the most ostentatious Victorian Gothic chapel. The Centre of Ashton-Under-Lyne in the conurbation of Greater Manchester illustrates this well. It is dominated by two churches: the ancient parish church of St Michael and the splendid Albion Congregational Church a few hundred yards away. Built in 1890-5, Albion Church was the product of the support of wealthy Liberal mill owners, and it is the second largest congregational chapel in the country. As Nikolaus Pevsner commented, ‘with its size and its spire, it places itself in deliberate competition with St Michael’s.’ This intriguing relationship symbolises the tension between the rising nonconformist churches and the established church, which ran deep through the fabric of society.

Nonconformity was popular in the Ashton area long before industrialisation, and the first Congregational chapel was established one and a half miles from the Centre of town at Dukinfield Hall in the mid 17th century. Here the lord of the manor was Colonel Robert Dukinfield, a staunch Nonconformist and a leading parliamentarian. As early as the 1640s, after hearing Samuel Eaton preach a fiery sermon at Chester, Colonel Dukinfield made him his chaplain in the chapel attached to Dukinfield Hall. George Fox made his first speech at Dukinfield in 1647, before his involvement with the Quaker movement, and the Dukinfield family later sponsored Samuel Angier, a Presbyterian, who from 1677 held services in a barn until Dukinfield Old Chapel was built in 1707. The Moravians too set up their first community in Dukinfield in the mid-1740s, before moving to their present Fairfield Settlement at Droylsden, south-west of Ashton in 1785. Planned and built by its own people as a self-contained and self-governed community, Fairfield had its own shop, bakery, public house, laundry, farm, doctor, fire engine and even its own inspector of weights and measures.

Methodism was first brought to the Ashton area by the Rev David Taylor, a wandering preacher who conducted his first sermon in the town in 1741. It was to be another 40 years before the first Wesleyan chapel was built in Ashton in 1781-2, from money raised by members of its congregation. The fundraising must have been a considerable feat, for records show that the number of members had fallen to as low as 15 in 1780. The success of the effort was largely due to local preacher Peter Walker, who was prepared to travel as far away as Derbyshire to collect subscriptions. The scheme would have been impossible had it not been for James Harrop, the only ‘man of means’ within the local society who almost certainly donated land at Harrop’s Yard, near Cricketer’s Lane for the chapel. A 19th century engraving of the building shows that it resembled an early industrial building – a plain structure, two storeys in height with large windows. There was no communion table inside, as it was regarded as a ‘preaching house’, supplementary to worship within the parish church. As such its services were not to be held at the same time as those in St Michael’s, and chapel members were expected to attend a communion service in the Anglican church four times a year.

John Wesley visited the Harrop’s Yard Chapel twice, first in 1782 then in 1788,
when aged 85, three years before he died. It was in the years following his death that local Methodists were prominent in the serious dissention that occurred within the church. A group led by Alexander Kilham wanted to have full right to choose who could administer communion. The majority of Ashton Methodists agreed and the ensuing disagreement with the Methodist Conference produced a schism. A breakaway group known as the Methodist New Connexion (MNC) was founded. Although this body was in the minority within Methodism, in industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire the new group was strong.

Following the schism, the Wesleyan Methodists were left with just 25 loyal members in the town and no place of worship, as they now found themselves barred from the MNC Chapel, as did any Wesleyan preachers who were sent to the town. They were forced to worship in a house until 1824, when a small chapel was built for them on the opposite side of Stamford Street to the MNC’s replacement chapel. When in a permanent place of worship, the Wesleyan’s membership almost doubled from 22 in 1803 to 41 in the following year.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries Manchester expanded rapidly with the growth of the cotton trade and manufacturing particularly in its smaller satellite towns to the north and east on the lower slopes of the Pennines. Between 1770 and 1800 the population of Ashton grew by 300 per cent to 8,000. The industry was essentially domestic with most men working from home in scattered industrial villages and hamlets. Although working conditions were often poor, the workers enjoyed many freedoms and benefits, and various apprentice systems regulated the flow of new labour into the industry ensuring higher wages. But as elsewhere in England, this domestic system of industry was rapidly being overtaken by cheaper mechanised processes, and the handloom weavers also found themselves threatened by the development of new working practices. The lapse of the Apprenticeship Acts and their eventual repeal in 1813-14, led to a flood of cheap labour from the depressed countryside and from Ireland. Weaving was a relatively unskilled job and the number of handloom weavers rocketed from 50,000 in 1769 to 240,000 in 1820.

By now the south Lancashire town of Ashton-under-Lyne was a Centre of the declining trade, although handloom weaving still lingered over two decades later. The appalling living conditions of the displaced handloom weaver and his family are described in The Morning Chronicle, the national radical newspaper. In a letter to the paper in 1851, a correspondent described the town’s population as having ‘the reputation of being turbulent and fanatical... The most ultra-political and theological opinions run riot amongst the population.’ Such populations were ripe for the influence of new political and religious ideas, and it was in areas such as Ashton that the Nonconformist churches enjoyed their strongest support.

Although conditions in Ashton-under-Lyne were ideal for Nonconformist churches to flourish, dissenting bodies in Ashton found it difficult to establish a foothold. For over half of the 19th century, the Parish of Ashton was under the control of a notorious rector, the Rev George Chetwode and his uncle, the Earl of Stamford who was the largest landowner in the area. George Chetwode gained the Living following the premature resignation of the previous incumbent, the Rev John Hutchinson. Although Chetwode spent almost all his
time at his other Living of Chilton in Buckinghamshire where he resided in style in a large mid-18th century country mansion, the Rev Chetwode received a stipend of £1,500 per annum from his Living at Ashton. From this income he paid two curates each the sum of £125 per year and lent them the parsonage. He also subscribed £5 per annum to the churchwardens’ expenses and gave £2 to the school fund. This expenditure left Chetwode a disposable income of £1,243. Additional money also came from the sale of coal reserves beneath the church’s glebe land.

As if the crude financial benefits enjoyed by Chetwode were not enough to anger his Ashton parishioners, their hostility was heightened by the astounding fact that he seldom visited the town. The 1831 census shows that there were a mere 315 souls living in his Buckinghamshire parish, compared with more than 33,500 in the parish of Ashton-under-Lyne. In the year before he died a ‘hale old man of near 80’ it was reported that Chetwode had not been near his church at Ashton for ten years, and had not officiated there for 30 years.

Through his greed and indifference, Chetwode had unwittingly contributed to the success of Nonconformist churches. Despite the weak opposition from the Church of England, Nonconformist churches in the town faced one major obstacle. The principal landowner, the 6th Earl of Stamford, was hostile to Methodism and would not allow the erection of dissenting chapels on his land and even inserted a clause into all his leases to that effect. A major reason for this behaviour was that the church’s Living would lose some of its value if its potential congregation was allowed to fall, by being spirited away to alternative churches.
6. THE CHURCH

The current Methodist church was constructed in 1832 and is the replacement Methodist Church to an earlier chapel constructed on the same site in 1799, the earlier chapel was accessed of Harrops yard and included some small cottages and workshops.

As the membership began to grow at Stamford Street chapel, after 1826 as the population increased and spurred on by the growing strength of the Congregationalists, plans were made as early as 1827 for extensions to the chapel.

As a result the former chapel was taken down together with the cottages and a new, imposing church, half as long again as the old one. The present day Methodist chapel was opened December 2 1832. It had high box pews seating 900, a plain high pulpit and space for a small orchestra replaced by an organ. Lighting was gas.

Common to most Methodist churches, the overall architectural aesthetic is one of simplicity, order and function.
The church is four sided with 7 bays. Built entirely of brick in Flemish bond, with stone stringcourse at first floor. The external elevations are devoid of architectural ornament, with only the stone Doric Porch that adds an elaborate and dominating doorway. The roof covering is welsh blue slate.

At seven bays and two stories, the window openings of the church make best use of natural light. Windows openings are large double height, with a mix of siding sash windows the ground floor windows are squared, 4 panes with stone cills and lintels. 1st floor windows are brick spring arched with timber sash windows six panes.

Fig 4, Stamford Street Methodist Church, 1990

At the time of writing the report, all externals windows are boarded over and few original examples remain. The external picture at fig 4 is believed to have been taken in the early 1990’s. The picture gives a view of the building in its context.
Fig 5 (above) Stamford Street Methodist Church, front elevation, securely boarded up May 2012. Below at fig 6, shows the Warrington Street elevation, again all openings boarded over.
Fig 7 above showing Harrops Yard elevation and below at Fig 8 Fleet Street (rear) elevation
Fig 9, indication boundary wall

Fig 10, current internal situation
Fig 11, Internal view

INTERNAL
Stamford Street Methodist Church has lost all of its internal fixtures and fittings as are clearly shown in figs 10 & 11.

Therefore there is no architectural merit other than the large open space.
7. STAMFORD STREET METHODIST CHURCH – SIGNIFICANCE

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) elements of the historic environment are termed heritage assets and fall into two categories, designated, which includes listed buildings and scheduled monuments and undesignated assets. Chapter 12 s131 of the NPPF ‘Conserving and enhancing the historic environment’ in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The crucial element of NPPF is that it requires the applicant to present an account of the significance of the heritage assets affected by a proposal, along with the contribution of their setting to that significance.

As the significance of a building/s can take various aspects, the purpose of the assessment is to establish the nature of the significance of the building known as Stamford Street Methodist Church. This has been gathered by the consideration of the evidence gathered during the survey and historical archives.

In establishing the significance of the building, the following objectives have been set:

- Establishing the significance of the buildings overall, in terms of their national, regional and the areas in which that significance lies.
- Establishing the relative significance of the individual buildings within the group, along with the relative significance of their features. The purpose of this is to guide the planning and design process as to which structures and which features of the structures are most important and those, which are less so.
- Establishing the potential risk presented to the building, its features and its significance by their present condition and also by the proposed development proposals.

National;

The fact the building is nationally statutory listed buildings as being of special architectural or historic interest implies the building’s importance. The building’s significance chiefly lies at this level and for the following reasons.
• In terms of their type, as a good example of the substantial number of buildings associated with the growing religious movements in the Ashton Under Lyne area.

• In terms of architectural interest, in its size, construction and details such as stone Doric portico and window openings.

• In terms of its setting, for the building forms a visually impressive and distinctive building in Ashton Under Lyne Town Centre and the positive views obtained in all directions.

• The building is important for its part in the social history of Ashton Under Lyne and the number of people who attended as its congregation.


8. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS & IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This assessment has shown that the former Stamford Street Methodist church is a designated heritage asset whose significance lies in its architectural and historic interest, setting and its presence in the townscape. The National Planning Policy framework (NPPF March 2012) indicates that the impact of development upon heritage assets needs to be given weight, as their significance can be harmed through development or alteration within their setting. In this context, the following areas of potential impact by the proposal will be examined.

1. The principle of the proposed conversion to residential use generally

   2. The impact of the conversion upon the building and its setting

1. The principle of conversion to residential use.

   The building is currently disused and in a state of some disrepair and has been for some time. Continued disuse prevents a risk that the fabric may deteriorate further.

   In principle therefore, the proposed conversion and refurbishment to residential use is favorable, as it will bring the building into a viable use consistent with its conservation, and thus preserving its significance. The principle of the proposal is therefore in accordance with policy 131 of the NPPF, and also policies C2, C4 & C5 of Tameside Unitary Development Plan 2004.

2. Impact upon the building and its setting.

   Any conversion to residential use must be achieved in a manner, which does not injure the established historic character or significance of the buildings, and the features, which contribute highly to its significance.

   Accordingly, the design and access statement by DV Architects, state that their objective is not only to provide essential amenities for prospective owners of the 12 units proposed, but to preserve, enhance and bring back in to use this significant building and to minimize the impact upon the special character and appearance of the building and preserve its surviving historic features and details.

   We consider that the proposal meets the spirit of Tameside UDP Policy C5 (alternative uses, alterations and additions for Listed Buildings). Indeed, the proposal strikes a positive balance to the buildings preservation and conservation to its external appearance.

   • Internal subdivision of the church;

   Currently the church has no remaining internal features other than the large open space associated with a Methodist church. Internal separation walls, floors and staircases are to be introduced to create 12 new residential units. This will involve the loss of the large open space associated with the church. However, as the introduction of these partitions is an unavoidable aspect of reuse and its viability, the
proposal strikes a balance between finding a new use for a building which has unfortunately been left disused for far too long and the gradual removal of all internal features.

In essence, the insertion of a self-supporting internal structure, which takes no structural support from the church itself, is welcome. However, given the current overall condition of the church and the fact that no existing lateral constraints is in existence, and the evident failure of the roof in providing adequate compression there is a perceived danger from walls collapsing in on themselves or moving outwards in a ‘bellying’ action. Therefore, I have recommended that urgent action be taken to further stabilize the church building.

- **Openings;**
The window openings are features of high significance as they provide key evidence of the history of the building and are very much the established character. The design and access statement state that existing openings and details will be maintained wherever possible. It notes however, that most if not all surviving windows will be replaced in a style similar to the existing.

One key aspect of such an intervention is the likelihood of the internal structure being visible across the window openings, this can often be mitigated by either;

- Replacement window design to accommodate such impacts, i.e. smoked or cultured glass panels in key locations.
- Coloured ‘one way’ glazed secondary double glazing

I would advise a suitable condition be placed on any resulting Listed building consent.

- **Roof;**
To necessitate the conversion to 12 residential units, the roof of the church will be repaired and recovered in a like for like material with the insertion of a number of conservation style roof lights. However, existing main trusses will remain insitu. The impact of the roof lights is acceptable and will not adversely affect the established character of the church.
9. CONCLUSION

This heritage assessment should be read in conjunction with the plans (DV Architects), which give detail to the proposed conversion.

The building of the former Stamford Street Methodist Church is still an important heritage asset (despite the complete loss of internal features highlighted at the point of original listing). In its present disused state the building is considered to be at serious risk of loss and the proposal to convert the church to residential is a viable one consistent with its conservation.

The design & access statement (DV Architects) confirms that the proposed conversion works intend to minimize the impact upon the special character and appearance of the building and to retain existing openings and detailing where possible. The primary significance of the church is its external appearance and its presence in the street scene; therefore its external conservation is paramount.

However, the proposed subdivision to 12 residential units will mean the loss of the large open internal space. Without this subdivision, the proposal and hence the buildings long term future and conservation would not be viable and therefore a reasonable compromise would appear to be that internal subdivision is justified and will help preserve the buildings external significance.

In relation to the proposed conversion and wider conservation of the heritage assets, the proposal has demonstrated that it meet the spirit and corresponds with new national planning policy (NPPF) and I believe that the proposal will indeed bring renewed benefits to the heritage asset.

The proposals are considered to strike a reasonable balance between the special interest of the buildings and the need to secure a long-term viable use for the whole site in a manner that will address other strands of planning policy legislation and building regulations.

The key features and elements of significance are:

- The simple rectangular plan form
- The tall, arched windows, and their openings
- Main entrance, stone portico
- The Classical influence of design, principles of symmetry and the relationship between elements are retained.
- The chapel is also historically connected to the history Ashton Under Lyne, its development and social history.

Whilst, the church listed and within a conservation area. It is prudent to set out some key principles and a conversion philosophy, whilst minimising the impact upon the character of the heritage asset.
• Significant parts of the fabric will not be irreversibly damaged and any impact on it will be limited.
• Views of the building would not be compromised
• No practical alternatives exist that would not require intervention in the Chapel.
• The key test of acceptability is that – there is no loss of special interest of the building.

It is our conclusion that the proposals are considered to strike a positive response between the special interest in the building and the need to secure a long term viable use for the site. Further, we propose a programme of urgent repairs is undertaken as soon as practical to minimize any further risk of deterioration of the building.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS & MITIGATION

In the consideration of any planning application seeking listed building consent, it is prudent to recommend specific conditions/actions to control such works, which directly impact upon identified elements of the buildings significance.

It is our professional opinion that given the overall poor condition of the church and the viability of the proposed scheme, that consideration be given to undertake remedial 'like for like' repairs in absence of a formal consent. However, it may be pragmatic to submit a planning application for the schemes proposal and for external works to commence in the meantime under the auspices of the local planning authority.

The remedial works could consist of:

• Internal floor slab/support to provide an adequate supporting base to the church and provide a degree of lateral constraint.
• To undertake external works to all brickwork, such as repointing and replacement where necessary.
• Roof repairs, re-sluating, insulation, timber treatment and rainwater goods

These works are considered essential repairs to be carried out as soon as possible to ensure that the church is in a condition to receive its eventual new internal structure. Accordingly, The Conservation Areas & Listed Buildings Act 1990, makes provision for works such as the above to commence under like for like repairs without the need for formal Listed Building consent.

The above works would not affect or compromise the special character of the church.

I therefore propose the following conditions be attached to any formal planning consent.

• Samples of and details of all replacement windows, including size, glazing details and construction details.
• All roof covering samples to be approved
• Sample or details of conservation roof lights to be submitted for approval
• All works to brickwork including, replacement, bond, pointing to be submitted for approval
• All external/landscaping details to be submitted for approval.

In undertaking this appraisal, it has been highlighted that a number of gravestones exist in the Harrops Yard adjacent to the Church.

A specific condition should be imposed that respects the gravestones, their preservation and against damage. This may include a method statement to ensure that any scaffolding is suitably arranged to prevent any damage.

11. REFERENCES

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12. APPENDIX

Church, 1832. Flemish bond brick with slate roof. 4-sided gallery plan with 7 x 4 bays and a C20 extension to east. Pedimented front has stone plinth with slightly advanced central 2 bays. Tetrastyle Greek Doric porch. Sash windows to either side have stone sills, flat brick arches and marginal glazingbars. 4 first floor windows have semi-circular heads, stone sills and sashes with marginal glazing bars. 3 windows within tympanum. Side elevations repeat similar windows. Internally the hall has been split horizontally by a suspended ceiling above gallery level. The gallery has a panelled parapet and is supported on fluted columns. Pedimented organ loft on gallery to (ritual) east. Elaborate plaster frieze with shell motifs and decorative detailing to ceiling. Box pews remain at lower level only. 1930s light pendants of particular quality. A stone incorporated in the right of the church is a relic from the first chapel occupied by the Methodist New Connexion in Ashton in 1797. W. Glover, History of Ashton-under-Lyne, 1884.
Example of gravestone in Harrop’s Yard
Picture attached to listing schedule, 12th January 1967