

2.4 REFERENCE NO - 22/500563/FULL		
APPLICATION PROPOSAL Repair and partial reconstruction of church wall, including installation of a horizontal metal rail to the sections of wall between each pier, supported by decorative metal brackets.		
ADDRESS St Michaels Church High Street Sittingbourne Kent ME10 4PG		
RECOMMENDATION - Grant		
SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION The development proposal would enable the repair and reconstruction of a historic wall in a manner appropriate to its heritage significance and in accordance with policies in the Local Plan.		
REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE The application has been submitted by Swale Borough Council.		
WARD Chalkwell	PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL	APPLICANT Swale Borough Council AGENT N/A
DECISION DUE DATE 13/04/22		PUBLICITY EXPIRY DATE 24/03/22

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

SW/05/0347

Landscape and access improvements - proposed alterations to existing means of enclosure along northern perimeter of Churchyard-

No Objection Decision Date: 22.11.2005

SW/99/0854

Church Notice board

Granted Express Consent Decision Date: 29.10.1999

SW/98/0780

Two internally illuminated poster panels forming an integral part of the bus shelter

Refused Decision Date: 10.11.1998

SW/93/0665

Enclose an existing entrance porch to church hall and extend pitched roof over flat roofs at sides

Approved Decision Date: 03.09.1993

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

- 1.1** The application site relates to the front boundary wall to the south of the churchyard of St Michael's Church, and which fronts onto the High Street. The church dates from the eleventh century and both the church building and the wall are Grade II* listed. The site is centrally located along Sittingbourne High Street, and it falls within the Sittingbourne

High Street Conservation Area boundary. The site is located within the built-up area boundary of the town.

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The development proposal relates to the repair, repointing and partial reconstruction of the sections of the church wall that have fallen into disrepair. In addition, it is proposed that metal railings are installed along the top of the wall, between each of the piers, which would restore the appearance of the wall as would have been prior to World War II.
- 2.2 As part of the proposed works, repairs are to be carried out to the knapped flintwork in each pier and repointing work will be undertaken where required. Each of the wall bays between the piers are to be partially reconstructed through the dismantling of the flint skin on the pavement side of the wall. The flint skin of the wall will be set aside for re-building purposes, the rubble backfill will be excavated and the core of the wall will be rebuilt using modern blockwork. The method used to replace the rubble infill of the wall will allow the flint skin of the wall which faces into the churchyard to remain in place whilst the flint skin of the retaining wall section is reconstructed.
- 2.3 The proposed works to the wall are to be undertaken due to multiple repairs which have been required to the wall over the years. The need for such works have been established following inspection and discussions between the Council's Heritage Team and specialist contractors.
- 2.4 Members should also note that in this instance listed building consent is not required. This is because the works are subject to Ecclesiastical Exemption, and instead are subject to a faculty application to the Diocese of Canterbury.

3. PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

- 3.1 The site constraints are as follows:
 - Grade II* Listed Building and wall
 - Sittingbourne Conservation Area
 - Area of Archaeological Potential
 - Town Centre Boundary
 - Primary Shopping Area
 - Proposed Regeneration Area – Regen 1
 - SSSI Impact Risk Zone
 - Groundwater Source Protection Zone

4. POLICY AND CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 National Planning Policy Framework 2021
- 4.2 Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan 2017 policies:

ST1	Delivering sustainable development in Swale
ST3	The Swale Settlement Strategy
ST5	The Sittingbourne Area Strategy
CP4	Requiring good design
CP8	Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment
DM14	General development criteria

DM32	Development involving Listed Buildings
DM33	Development affecting a Conservation Area

Sittingbourne Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy March 2011

Planning and Development Guidelines No. 8 – Conservation Areas

5. LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS

5.1 No local representations have been received.

6. CONSULTATIONS

6.1 Ward Councillors – Cllr Whelan has confirmed that he has no objection to the proposal.

6.2 Historic England – Do not wish to offer advice, and suggest that advice is sought from the Council's specialist conservation and archaeological advisors.

6.3 Kent County Council Highways Team – The proposal does not meet the criteria to warrant involvement from the Highway Authority

6.4 Kent County Council Archaeology Team – Support the proposal. No archaeological measures are required in connection with the proposal. However, it would be appropriate for a photographic record to be maintained during works.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PLANS

7.1 The applicant has provided appropriate plans and a heritage statement.

8. APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

8.1 The application site is centrally located within Sittingbourne. The application relates to the repair and restoration of an existing historic boundary wall, and the key considerations relate to the heritage impacts arising from this.

Impact on Designated Heritage Assets

8.2 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on a local planning authority, in considering development which affects a listed building or its setting, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting, or any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a requirement on a local planning authority in relation to development in a Conservation Area, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

8.3 The NPPF also states that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. (para.199).

- 8.4 Policy DM32 of the Swale Local Plan 2017 states that proposals that affect a designated heritage asset, or its setting, will be permitted only where the building's special architectural or historic interest, and its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, are preserved. Policy DM33 of the Swale Local Plan 2017 states that new development within, or adjacent to, a conservation area is expected to be both of an appropriate use, of a very high standard of design, and to respond positively to the grain of the historic area by preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the place. In addition, buildings or features which make a valuable contribution to the character of a conservation area individually, or as part of a group, should be conserved, and that their demolition should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, subject to the submission and approval of a detailed plan for redevelopment.
- 8.5 As stated above, St Michael's Church is a Grade II* listed building. Historic records show that a church has been present on the site since the 11th century and the existing western tower is believed to have been constructed between the 13th and 15th century. The building has been subject to various alterations and additions over the years and was restored by George Dance Senior following a fire in 1762. Other restoration work is believed to have been carried out on the building by Slater and Carpenter between 1859 and 1887. The historic significance of the church lies in the extent of surviving medieval fabric and in the many architectural features of interest, which include carved stone heads to the exterior and interior, a 15th century font and tomb, and stained glass windows, (in particular, the Victorian east window of the Last Supper and the memorial window to the First World War in the south transept).
- 8.6 The boundary wall is described in the listing description as follows:
- “Churchyard wall and gate piers, also in knapped flint with stone dressings. Gate piers rise from plinths, are square in section and have pyramidal caps with gables on each face.”*
- 8.7 The listing description highlights the importance of the boundary wall as a historic feature of the site. The heritage assessment which has been provided breaks down the levels of significance and places high significance upon the evidential, historic and communal value of the church, and medium significance on its aesthetic value.
- 8.8 The Sittingbourne Conservation Area Appraisal states that ‘St Michael's Church is the principal landmark in the Conservation Area and provides visual relief to the built edges of the High Street. The knapped flint boundary wall...continues to provide enclosure to the street edge.’ The church and associated boundary wall are considered to make a significant contribution to the important views along the High Street.
- 8.9 As stated above, the proposed works to the boundary wall allow for the dismantling of the front flintwork skin to the wall panels which face on to the pavement and for their partial reconstruction using knapped flintwork set in lime mortar, which is to be set around modern blockwork to the central spine of the wall in the place of the current rubble infill. The modern blockwork will not be visible and will be used to strengthen the wall's core. The proposed works also allow for the cleaning and relaying of the redbrick, weathered concrete, and stone coping detail to the wall, and to the replacement of

stonework to the intervening piers where erosion has occurred. It is also proposed to reinstate horizontal metal railings above the churchyard wall in order to restore its historic appearance, based on archive photographs of the church which date to pre-1940, when the railings were removed and melted down for the war effort.

- 8.10 The proposed works to the boundary wall are one of several proposals being implemented by the Council in order to improve the quality of the public realm within Sittingbourne town centre. The boundary wall is in a state of disrepair and has been subject to multiple repairs. Whilst the works proposed would in part lead to the removal of sections of the wall bays, such works are designed to conserve its historic character and appearance of the wall on a long-term basis, in order to negate the requirements for continued short-term repairs, and to restore historic features which have been lost. The works are to be carried out by specialist contractors and are to incorporate the reuse of existing flintwork and bricks in order to retain as much of the historic fabric as possible. Any fabric which cannot be salvaged will be replaced on a like-for-like basis and the appearance of the wall will remain the same. The introduction of metal railings between the piers will restore a feature which has been lost and will reduce the potential for future damage to the wall. The proposal is considered to conserve and enhance the existing features of the wall and it will not detract from the significance of the designated heritage asset. The continued maintenance issues which have arisen due to the deterioration of the wall are considered to constitute sufficient justification for the works, which aim to preserve the long-term structural integrity and historic appearance of the wall.
- 8.11 The repair and restoration of the boundary wall will preserve an important historic feature within the Conservation Area, which will help to conserve the historic views along the high street and the scenic quality of the area. The installation of railings between the piers will reintroduce a traditional feature to the wall which will add to the sense of enclosure along the high street. The use of historically appropriate materials will enhance the existing character of the wall.
- 8.12 The Council's Conservation Officer has raised no objection to the proposed works, and supports the proposal, subject to conditions. Likewise, Historic England raise no objection to the proposal.
- 8.13 Taking the above into account, although the works proposed would involve some demolition, the reconstruction methods proposed are appropriate and I consider that the development would preserve and enhance this heritage asset and would comply with national and local policy.

Impact on Visual Amenity

- 8.14 Policy CP4 of the Swale Local Plan 2017 requires development proposals to be of high-quality design and to be in keeping with the character of the area. It states that particular regard should be paid to the scale, height, materials, detailing, mass, bulk, articulation and site coverage of any future proposals.
- 8.15 The proposed repair works to the boundary wall will improve the appearance of the wall whilst retaining its existing character. The proposed railings are modest in scale and their traditional character will complement the existing built form on the site. The

proposed works are considered to be acceptable from a design perspective and wider streetscene perspective.

Impact on Neighbouring Amenity

- 8.16 Policy DM14 states that any new proposed developments should not cause significant harm to the amenities of surrounding uses or areas and due consideration will be given to the impact of the proposed development upon neighbouring properties. Any new proposed schemes should not result in significant overshadowing through a loss of daylight or sunlight, in an unreasonable loss of privacy, in an unreasonable loss of outlook or in excessive noise or odour pollution.
- 8.17 Owing to the nature of the proposed works and the site location, the proposals would not impact neighbouring amenity in a negative manner.

Highways

Owing to the location of the boundary wall, which acts as a retaining wall between the churchyard and the pavement, the proposed repair works have the potential to impact pedestrian access along the High Street for the duration of the works. An informative will be added to any future consent to advise that consent may be required from Kent County Council for any likely obstructions in this regard.

Other Matters

- 8.18 Archaeology – The application site is located in an area of archaeological potential. The Kent County Council Archaeology team have been consulted and have confirmed that no archaeological measures are required. However, they have recommended that a photographic record should be maintained during the construction phase of the development. This will be secured via condition.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The development proposal would preserve and enhance a designated heritage asset and no adverse planning impacts have been identified. On this basis, the proposal is in accordance with the Local Plan and the NPPF.

- 10. RECOMMENDATION - GRANT** subject to the following conditions:

CONDITIONS

- (1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission:

Reason: In accordance with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- (2) No development shall take place other than in strict accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

2021-AR-07-200, Boundary wall plan, 2021-AR-07-201 Rev A, Red edged site location plan, Heritage Statement, Section 3 Specification document.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development and to safeguard the enjoyment of their properties by existing and prospective occupiers.

- (3) Sample sections of the metal railings and the two different types of supporting scroll brackets to be used (all in their proposed proprietary black paint finish) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the installation of the railing element to the wall. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interest of protecting and preserving the integrity of the designated heritage asset.

- (4) Drawn (sectional) details, a written specification and/or a practical trial demonstration of the specific method (and materials used) in the fixing of the metal rail to the wall shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the installation of the railing element to the wall. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interest of protecting and preserving the integrity of the designated heritage asset.

- (5) No more than a two metre length of wall shall be removed until a sample panel of the combined inner blockwork spine wall and flintwork face has been erected for inspection on site, and no further development shall take place until such details have been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The vertical sample panel (to be erected following the removal of the existing flintwork face and rubble core) shall be of not less than 1m² in vertical face area, and shall show the heritage lime-based mortar mix to be used (which shall also be confirmed in writing by the contractor at the time of the site inspection) and shall show the specific pointing form/profile to be used. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interest of protecting and preserving the integrity of the designated heritage asset.

- (6) No development shall be commenced until a sample section of replacement stone, replacement knapped flints and replacement red bricks to be used have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interest of protecting and preserving the integrity of the designated heritage asset.

- (7) A photographic record shall be maintained by an archaeologist approved by the Local Planning Authority during the removal / excavation of any parts of the existing wall so that any items of interest and finds are recorded. The development shall not commence until details of a scheme to provide such a photographic record have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning

Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To enable the recording of any items of historical or archaeological interest.

The Council's approach to the application

In accordance with paragraph 38 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), July 2021 the Council takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions. We work with applicants/agents in a positive and creative way by offering a pre-application advice service, where possible, suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome and as appropriate, updating applicants / agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application.

The application was considered by the Planning Committee where the applicant/agent had the opportunity to speak to the Committee and promote the application.

INFORMATIVE

(1) Please note that any obstructions to the highway will require the consent of Kent County Council. The applicant is advised to contact them in advance of any works commencing on site.

NB For full details of all papers submitted with this application please refer to the relevant Public Access pages on the council's website.

The conditions set out in the report may be subject to such reasonable change as is necessary to ensure accuracy and enforceability.

