

BRACKLEY FOX LANE GOSPEL HALL BRETHERN
TRUSTEES

**Proposed demolition of existing Brethren Meeting
Hall and construction of a Replacement Meeting
Hall with improved facilities, parking and
aesthetics, alongside No.1 Mallard Drive, at
Buckingham, MK18 1GJ**

Combined Planning / Design & Access Statement

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This combined Planning / Design & Access Statement accompanies a new planning application to Aylesbury Vale District Council for the demolition of the existing Brethren Gospel Hall Meeting Hall and the erection of a replacement Meeting Hall on the Mallard Drive, Buckingham site with improved facilities, parking provision and aesthetics. The new Hall would be approximately twice the size of the existing Hall in floor area and be provided with twice the number of car parking spaces (8 in total, including one disabled space) plus a cycle store with space for up to 8 bicycles.
- 1.2 The existing Hall on the site has been used successfully for six years by a small congregation of local Brethren worshippers who mostly live within the immediate vicinity of the Hall. Within the past two years, natural increases within families that attend, plus members getting married has resulted in an increase in attendees and the facilities have become quite cramped; hence the reason for this application.
- 1.3 The application also proposes a variation to Condition 2 of permission 11/01292/APP, dated 22nd September 2011, to enable the replacement Meeting Hall on the site to be used on up to four occasions per week (i.e. one extra Sunday afternoon gospel preaching meeting and up to one extra weekday evening meeting) rather than the currently permitted two occasions of Sunday mornings and Monday evenings.
- 1.4 The Brethren belong to a worldwide Christian fellowship known as the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, [www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org] who have similar places of worship throughout the UK and the world. Many of these places of worship are located in similar neighbourhoods to Mallard Drive, without causing any nuisance to the neighbouring residents. One of the prime purposes of the Trust, as registered with the Charities Commission, is the advancement of Christian religion for the public benefit. The Trustees therefore need to improve the present facility to bring it up to what would be regarded as an acceptable standard for a place of Public Religious Worship, and enable use for a gospel preaching on Sunday afternoons approximately once a month, plus the opportunity for another occasional early evening service during the week. The Brethren are a family-oriented group, whose services are quiet and unobtrusive. All services last a maximum of 1 hour. Their meeting halls are only ever used for religious services by themselves.

- 1.5 The purpose of this Design and Access statement is to provide a summary of the rationale for this new planning application in design terms, so that the proposal may be clearly and succinctly understood in terms of the principles and concepts that have informed its design process.
- 1.6 The Design and Access statement does not form part of the planning application, as stated in DCLG Circular 01/2006.
- 1.7 The aim of this statement is twofold. Firstly, it is to ensure that decision-making is clearly documented in relation to the site-specific opportunities and constraints affecting the development of the plot; and secondly, is to demonstrate how the final proposal has been informed by a set of principled objectives, which have stemmed from the preceding analysis and appraisal work.
- 1.8 This document also supports, explains and justifies in planning policy terms the proposed larger replacement Gospel Meeting Hall at Mallard Drive.

Purpose of the development

- 1.9 The purpose of the development proposal is to provide an enlarged replacement Meeting Hall, which would be 54.6m² in area, plus two toilets (of 10m²) and a small entrance foyer (19.2m²). This purpose built facility would replace the existing 39.2m² Meeting Hall and foyer, which was converted from a former double garage block and garden shed. In addition to providing accommodation approximately twice the size of the existing facility, it would also provide attendees with two toilets, eight car parking spaces (including one disabled space) and a new cycle store and would therefore constitute a much enhanced facility.
- 1.10 This statement provides information about the development and its setting with details of construction techniques. It sets out the rationale behind the development proposal in terms of use, amount, layout, scale, appearance and access.

National and Local Policy Context

- 1.11 The design principles used in this site are based on National and Local Guidance including:

- Design and Access Statements, how to write, read and use them, CABE, 2006, reprinted 2007;
- DCLG Circular 10/2006 Guidance on changes Design and Access Statements, how to write, read and use them, CABE, 2006, reprinted 2007;
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance, CLG (March 2012);
- Better Places to Live – A Companion Guide to the old PPS3 on Housing, DTLR and CABE (2001);
- Urban Design Compendium, English Partnerships 1 and 2 (August 2000 and September 2007); and
- Saved policies in the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan (2004).

1.12 The Development Plan relevant to this application comprises the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan (2004) and relevant policies pertinent to the consideration of this application are General Policies GP8, GP24, GP35 and GP95.

1.13 The report is structured on the guidance provided by CABE on Design and Access Statements.

2 SITE APPRAISAL

Site Location

- 2.1 The application site lies in a residential estate area to the south of Buckingham town centre, on the northwest side of Mallard Drive, just north of its junction with Bourton Road. The site stands between Nos1 and 3, Mallard Drive, immediately west of a small public amenity space.
- 2.2 There is currently a wide open driveway to the front of the site and what appears externally as a double garage with attached shed, which are set back about 6m from the road frontage. The former garage and shed are in fact a Gospel Meeting Hall used by Brethren members of the Brackley Fox Lane Gospel Hall Trust who are all local residents living in the south part of Buckingham town or from the neighbouring village of Padbury. To the rear of the Hall is a large flat garden area that is unused. The whole site is surrounded by a combination of brick walls and close-boarded fencing, some with trellis fencing above, which extends from 1.8-2.4m high and thereby affords good screening to all of its immediate neighbours.
- 2.3 The existing Hall is set back just under 6m from the back of the highway, at 45° angle to the road. It extends across about two-thirds of the 13.5m wide site. The garden land at the rear extends back just over 13m from the back wall of the Meeting Hall. The driveway at the front affords space for up to four cars to be parked.

History

- 2.4 Retrospective planning permission was granted in September 2011 for the continued use of the Meeting Hall, which was originally converted into a Gospel Hall in 2008 (Ref: 11/01292/APP). The conditional consent granted at the time stipulated that the Gospel Hall was only to be used by the Brethren worshippers, and could only be used by them twice a week, between the hours 05.30-07.30 on Sunday mornings and 18.00-20.00 on Monday evenings.
- 2.5 The Mallard Drive estate was originally built in the early 1990's, in accordance with planning permission 92/02087/APP.

Character and Built Form

- 2.6 The Hall is used as a community use building by Brethren worshippers (Class D2) but appears outwardly as a residential garage and garden shed (ancillary Class C3).
- 2.7 The use has operated successfully within the confines of the site for approximately six years without ever having caused problems to the residential amenities of neighbouring property occupiers.

Access and movement to the site

- 2.8 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the site is from the single paved driveway off Mallard Drive. An extensive array of pathways and roads provide easy access to the Hall from Bourton Road and London Road and much of the surrounding Badgers Way estate.
- 2.9 The vast majority of Brethren worshippers who attend this Hall live in the immediate vicinity of the site and are therefore able to walk or cycle but a few travel from a little further afield in the town or from the local neighbourhood, and they sometimes drive. When they do, they are able to park in one of the four available parking spaces on the driveway and they have not therefore needed to park in the highway on Mallards Drive. Because the proposed replacement Hall would be about twice the size of the existing facility, the new Hall would be sited further back to enable eight car parking spaces to be provided plus a cycle store. This would ensure that any attendees who drive would continue to be able to park at the site clear of the Mallard Drive highway.

3 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Use

- 3.1 The use of the proposed replacement Hall would continue to provide an occasional meeting facility for Brethren worshippers in the local area, who have thus far only used the existing Hall for the Lord's Supper (early on Sunday mornings) and for a Prayer Meeting (on Monday evenings). The same local congregation would continue with those two meetings every week but also propose the addition of an occasional early evening Bible Reading meeting on Fridays and preaching of the Gospel on Sunday afternoons. These extra meetings would occur approximately once a month or less. The Trustees seek permission to include these additional times so that the congregation can fully follow the practices of all other Brethren Halls in the UK.
- 3.2 During the past six years, the existing Hall has tended to be used by no more than 13-25 people, but the Hall gets quite cramped when all twenty-five members attend and they have no sanitary facilities available on site during any of their meetings.
- 3.3 The Brethren have managed to use this facility without causing impact to their immediate neighbours for more than six years and would now like to increase the number of weekly meetings from two up to a maximum of four by adding a Sunday afternoon gospel preaching meeting and a Friday evening Bible reading meeting, which would only occur at monthly intervals. It would be the same local congregational attendees who we propose would meet on these additional occasions, so there would be no significant change in impact on surrounding residential amenities.

Location, Layout & Appearance

- 3.4 The location, design layout and appearance of the Meeting Hall stems entirely from the original former garage and garden shed. The replacement purpose built Hall would be approximately double the size of the existing structure in floor area, width and depth, but would be similarly single-storey proportioned, with a pitched roof, so would have a residential scale to it that would be characteristic of its surroundings.

Amount

- 3.5 The existing meeting Hall in the former garage and shed has a floor area of just 39.2m² and is contained within a single storey building with pitched roof measuring up to 8.6m wide and 6.0m deep.
- 3.6 The proposed replacement Hall would be about twice the size, i.e. 10.22m wide and 12.7m deep, with a 73.9m² Hall floor area but would also be single storey, with a pitched roof.

Design

- 3.7 The existing Hall is constructed of brick, with concrete roof tiles and is single-storey, with a pitched roof, a single door on the southern frontage and no windows. The proposed replacement Hall would have a similar design style (excluding the false garage doors on the frontage) plus an obscure glazed window on the southern frontage of the foyer, two small obscure glazed toilet windows on the western side elevation and a solid fire egress door on the eastern side elevation. The Meeting Hall room would be similarly designed to the existing Hall, with no windows.

Access & Parking

- 3.8 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the Hall is along Mallard Drive, north from Bourton Road. The existing driveway provides off-road parking for up to 4 cars, in a double-banked arrangement. There is a small 3-space lay-by in Mallard Drive, just 38m south of the site and although it has not been required during the last six years of use, it could if necessary provide an occasional supplemental visitor parking area.
- 3.9 As the Hall site is so accessible to the local Brethren community that it serves in the southern half of Buckingham, the majority of worshipers are able to walk or cycle from their nearby homes in Mallard Drive, Bourton Road, London Road, Badgers Way and Chandos Road.

4 DESIGN PROPOSAL

Use and Amount

- 4.1 Based on an appraisal of the site and its immediate context and the advice and conclusions given by Council Officers in their consideration of the previously approved conversion application and then in a subsequent informal pre-application enquiry, the following design principles were derived.
- 4.2 The existing Hall is Use Class D2 and the proposed replacement Hall would be an identical use class and be attended by the same Brethren worshipers. The proposed use would therefore be compliant with Condition 1 to AVDC approval 11/01292/APP. As a registered place of worship, the existing and proposed replacement Halls on this site must maintain free access to anyone who wishes to attend a Gospel meeting.
- 4.3 The amount of development would increase with this development proposal whereby the Hall area would increase from 33.6m² up to 73.9m² and the entrance foyer would increase from 11.2m² up to 21.4m² with two new 5m² toilets served off the foyer.

Location, Layout and Design Appearance

- 4.4 Because the proposed new building would be approximately twice the footprint size of the existing building it would replace, it is to be sited almost 11m back from the road frontage (about twice the distance of the existing Hall).
- 4.5 The simple layout of the existing Hall would be largely replicated in the replacement structure, with a small lobby foyer at the front giving access through to a square Meeting Hall at the rear.
- 4.6 In keeping with the existing Hall and its immediate surroundings, the replacement Hall would be single-storey and be constructed of matching bricks and roof tiles. A single steel door on the frontage would provide access to the building and there would be an opaque glazed window alongside. The rear of the building would be featureless and the two side elevations would be largely featureless, save for two small opaque glazed toilet windows on the west side and a single fire door on the east side.

4.7 The building would be located just over 1m in from the western side and northern rear boundary fences and between 1.84m-2.77m from the eastern side boundary fence.

4.8 Fire egress would be facilitated along the east side of the building out to the southern frontage. The southern frontage elevation of the new Hall would be set back approximately 27m from the driveway entrance and that paved driveway would provide dedicated off-street parking spaces that would all be independently accessible for eight cars plus eight bicycles in a new cycle store.

Size, Scale & Massing

4.9 The replacement building would be up to 10.22m wide and 12.7m deep. Its footprint size would be similar to that of the neighbouring dwellings but it would be just single storey. Although roughly twice the size of the existing Hall, the proposed new Hall would only be about half the massing size of the neighbouring dwellings.

Access

4.10 Vehicular and pedestrian access to both the existing Hall and its proposed replacement would continue to be via the existing driveway access off Mallard Drive.

4.11 By moving the new building further back on the plot, the parking area will be more than doubled in size and the eight new car parking spaces (including one disabled space) would all be independently accessible. In addition, space exists to enable a new cycle store to be constructed.

Materials

4.12 All the proposed materials that would be incorporated on the new replacement Hall would be similar to those used on the existing Hall and neighbouring dwelling houses.

Sustainability

4.13 The proposed location for this replacement Meeting Hall is on the same site as the existing Hall that it will replace. It is already a highly sustainable location for the worshippers who regularly attend, as they are mostly resident in Mallard Drive, Bourton Road, Chandos Road, London Road and Badgers Way and can therefore walk or cycle to their Gospel meeting Hall.

- 4.14 The NPPF advises, inter alia at paragraph 69, that “*planning policies and decisions, in turn, should aim to achieve places which promote opportunities for meetings between members of the community...*” and goes on to say at paragraph 70 that “*To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of... community facilities (such as...places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments...*” Permitting construction of this proposed replacement Gospel Meeting Hall would generally accord with the above NPPF advice and would be deemed a generally sustainable development.
- 4.15 Insofar as local Development Plan policies are concerned, these are most relevantly contained within policies GP8, GP24, GP35 and GP95 of the saved Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan (AVDLP, 2004). Policy GP8 seeks to protect residential amenities but by virtue of the existing consent for the Meeting Hall on the site, the Local Planning Authority accept that the Hall use does not cause unreasonable harm to the amenities of nearby residents. This proposal for a slightly larger and more appropriate replacement Hall would not substantively alter either the use or impact of that use on surrounding residents as the building would continue to be largely screened by boundary features and the religious worship activity within the building would be unchanged and still carried out by the same congregational members, just in a slightly larger building and on up to two extra occasions each month.
- 4.16 AVDLP Policy GP24 relates to car parking and stipulates that developments should comply with adopted parking standards. The current Hall maintains four car parking spaces and the proposed replacement Hall would have eight independently accessible car parking spaces, including one disabled space plus a new cycle store with space for up to eight cycles, so would be sufficient to comply with the adopted policy and meet the needs of a building roughly twice the size of the original building to be replaced.
- 4.17 AVDLP Policy GP35 relates to materials and design details. Because the proposed replacement Hall would be constructed with a similar design to that of the building it would replace and be constructed with similar building materials, the development would be compliant with this policy.

- 4.18 Finally, saved AVDLP policy GP95 relates to unneighbourly uses and advises that the Council will seek to protect amenities of existing occupiers and will resist developments that exacerbate adverse effects of existing uses. Although there were numerous complaints raised by local residents to the original Meeting Hall application in 2011, their concerns were deemed to be without foundation by the LPA because the religious use of the site had existed for over three years prior to the application being made without ever having caused detriment to its neighbours or indeed ever having been noticed. In the subsequent three years, the Hall use has continued without causing harm to its neighbours. Accordingly, whilst this proposal would replace the existing tiny Hall with one about twice the size and would be used on four occasions each week rather than two, it would nevertheless remain a very low-key use, undertaken by a small local congregational group, who would continue their worship in a similar manner within causing harm to the residential amenities of their immediate neighbours in Mallard Drive.
- 4.19 The development proposals would thus be compliant with all relevant Development Plan guidance, as well as relevant national NPPF guidance and would be sustainable in every way.

Landscape

- 4.20 Existing boundary features; like the 2m high close-boarded fencing along the western side boundary, the 1.8m high close-boarded fencing and 3.8m high hedgerow that runs along the northern boundary and the 1.8m high close-boarded fencing with 0.6m high trellis fencing above that runs along the eastern side boundary with the open amenity area will all be retained. Space exists in the southwest corner of the site, beside the boundary fence with No.1 Mallard Drive to enable a small new tree to be planted, to enhance the landscape setting of the redeveloped site.
- 4.21 The existing and proposed planting and fencing provide extensive screening to the site and Hall.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The use of this site as a Brethren Gospel Meeting Hall has been established for just over six years and was specifically approved by AVDC in 2011, under consent 11/01292/APP. The proposed replacement Hall would continue to be used by the same Brethren worshippers who have carried out their activities without impact or harm to any of their neighbours, in accordance with all the aged but nevertheless saved policies set out in the adopted Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan at policies GP8, GP24, GP.34 and GP95, as well as the relevant national guidance in the NPPF.
- 5.2 The replacement Hall would be about twice the footprint of the existing facility but no taller and it would provide attendees with a much enhanced facility, including twice the number of car parking spaces, with one disabled bay, plus a cycle store, two new toilets and a fire exit safety door.
- 5.3 Although larger, the new Hall would not necessarily attract any more users because its primary purpose is as a local facility to serve worshippers in the immediate locality of southern Buckingham and any larger services for communities in the wider area continue to be served from the much larger Halls at Western Avenue in Buckingham or at Brackley or Northampton.
- 5.4 The Brethren members have demonstrated through the use of their existing Hall during the last six years that they can use this site without causing detriment to their residential neighbours. In order to preach the gospel whilst complying with their charitable status, they wish now to increase the use made of the redeveloped site to enable two more monthly gospel preaching and Bible reading meetings to take place. Such increased use would be barely noticeable and would have no greater impact than the current usage on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings.
- 5.5 Accordingly, Aylesbury Vale District Council is respectfully requested to grant planning permission for this proposed replacement Hall and to relax condition 2 to approval 11/01292/APP to enable the Hall to continue being used on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings but also enable monthly gospel preaching meetings to be held on Sunday afternoons and a Bible reading meeting to take place once a month on Friday evenings.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – SITE LOCATION PLAN

APPENDIX 2 – SITE BLOCK & FLOOR PLAN

APPENDIX 3 – PROPOSED ELEVATIONS