

Installation of PV
panels for
generating
renewable energy.
Buxton Methodist
Church.

Planning Statement



- 1 Introduction / Summary of proposals
 - 1.1 The proposal is for the installation of PV panels on part of the roof of the Methodist Church in the Market Place, Buxton. The roof faces Torr Street and is oriented a few degrees west of due south. The purpose of the project is to reverse the increases in energy costs that the church has experienced in recent years by generating significant electricity direct from sunlight. The maximum capacity is 10 kw under ideal conditions.
 - 1.2 National and local policy is highly supportive of renewable energy especially solar energy. This stance is reflected in the fact that it is now permitted development on virtually all residential buildings. There are no noise or other emissions from PV and the operation does not involve any power inputs or resource consumption beyond that of manufacture and installation of the assembly.
 - 1.3 Buxton Methodist Church plays a very active role in the life of the community hosting many activities and groups, ranging from luncheon clubs to salsa dancing and weight watchers to Buxton Musical Society rehearsals, in addition to meeting the spiritual needs of its growing congregation.
 - 1.4 Rising energy costs are a threat to this highly valued community facility. Recent hikes in electricity prices have made the room bookings more marginal in terms of net revenue to the church especially in the winter half of the year. A reduction in energy costs will underpin the continued availability of community space for the groups who currently benefit from it
 - 1.5 In the 12 months March 2014 – March 2015 a total of 87 different groups or individuals hired space at the church. This is in addition to the 8 church based / supported groups which hold of regular events in the building. A full listing is to be found in Annex 1 of the Heritage Impact Statement.
 - 1.6 The roof plane proposed for the installation faces away from the Market Place which contains several listed buildings. It faces Torr Street which is lightly trafficked due to partial one way operation. Very few vehicles are observed exiting northwards onto Chapel Street facing the church.
 - 1.7 Rather than being presented as a plain rectangular protrusion from the roof the installation contains within it the symbol of the Cross in reverse relief which adds an appropriate element of visual interest and signals the purpose of the building.
 - 1.8 The remainder of this statement sets out the case for the development structured as shown overleaf

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- 3 Proposal in detail
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- 5 Conclusions

Annex A Details of the proposed panels *see separate document*
Annex B Pre Application advice *see separate document*

2 Site description

- 2.1 The Methodist Church sits in an imposing position at the south western corner of the market place. The principle views of the building from the market place are of the eastern elevation, which is the front entrance of the church, and the northern elevation fronting Fountain Street. No views of the proposed installation will be available from the market place.
- 2.2 Views of the roof area are highly restricted and available only from the south side of Chapel Street, the north end of Torr Street and a very short section of High Street where it joins Chapel Street. The north side of Chapel Street, which is the busier in terms of pedestrian movements, has highly restricted views due to the close proximity of the southern elevation of the church building and the protruding south transept.
- 2.3 The only full view of the installation is looking from the north end of Torr Street. The views referred to above are assessed in detail in section 4 of this statement.
- 2.4 The church building is constructed of stone under a traditional slate roof. The PV panels chosen are dark grey / black in colour with black edging. These are far less prominent than those with lighter coloured panels or edging strips. An information leaflet and photograph of the panels is included in Annex A.

Policy Context - NPPF

- 2.5 Support for renewable energy is expressed in strong terms in NPPF. Along with formal targets for capacity for each local authority and the recent changes to permitted development that allow almost all domestic roofs to be used for mounting PV arrays, it represents the clearest commitment of the government to securing increased power output from this source.

Extracts from NPPF overleaf are explicit on the point.
[Emphasis of the most relevant sections added]

10. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

93. Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. This is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

94. Local planning authorities should adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, taking full account of flood risk, coastal change and water supply and demand considerations.

95. To support the move to a low carbon future, local planning authorities should:

- plan for new development in locations and ways which reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- actively support energy efficiency improvements to existing buildings; and
- when setting any local requirement for a building's sustainability, do so in a way consistent with the Government's zero carbon buildings policy and adopt nationally described standards.

2.6 The installation of the PV panels has direct benefits both environmentally and socially through reduced emissions of CO₂ and by supporting the services that the church provides to the local community.

97. To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources. They should:

- have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources;
- design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts;
- consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure the development of such sources;¹⁷
- support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy, including developments outside such areas being taken forward through neighbourhood planning;

2.7 The Methodist church community has a long association with social and environmental concerns. It is wholly appropriate that the Church in the Market Place, as it is known, should signal this commitment to the wider community.

NPPF also sets the context for managing the historic environment

12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

126. Local planning authorities should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. In doing so, they should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. In developing this strategy, local planning authorities should take into account:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

131. In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

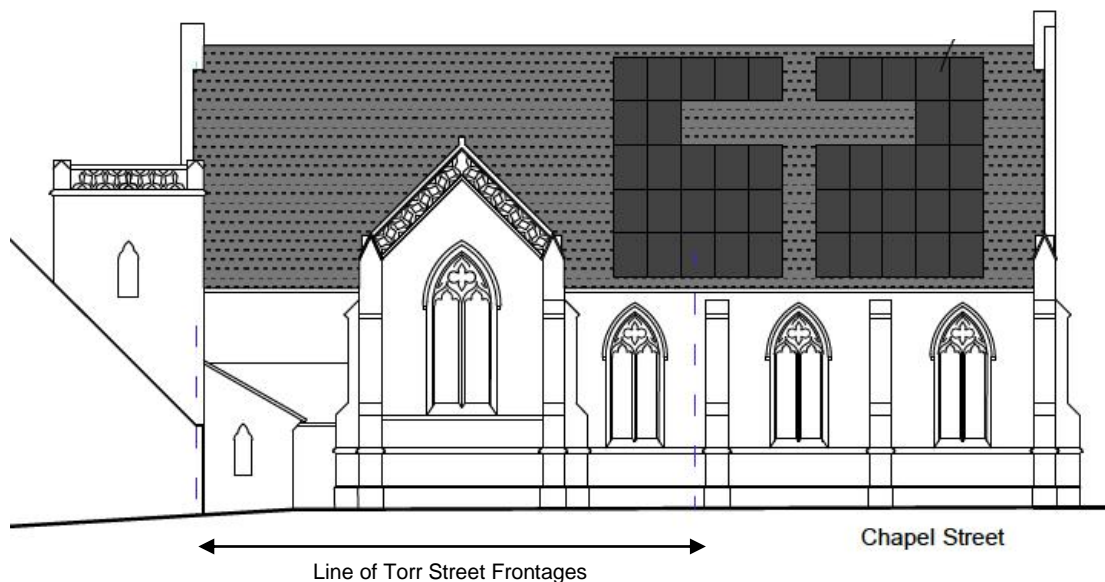
- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development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

2.8 NPPF has not changed the law on development in conservation areas. LPAs are obliged to seek to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA, as before. What NPPF has done is to introduce a structure and logic for arriving at that view and reduced the degree of subjectivity in the process. In particular it links the resistance of change to the significance of the heritage asset. In this case the building is not listed and the area of roof affected is not prominent in any major public space. The significance of the church building lies its conservation and re birth after the Methodist Church took over the building from the Wesleyans.

2.9 All the sections of national policy highlighted above are met by the proposals. The heritage issues and the case for positive social and environmental impact is explored in depth in the Heritage Impact Statement that accompanies this application.

3. The proposal in detail

- 3.1 The proposal is for 44 black faced / edged PV panels to be installed on part of the south facing roof of the church opposite Torr Street. The panels have a combined capacity of 10 kw (max).
- 3.2 A pre application exchange with the council raised concerns about the effect of the array of panels on the character of the building as a heritage asset. The council's letter of response is reproduced in Annex B.
- 3.3 The scheme as now proposed has responded to this concern. The panels have been arranged to create the symbol of the cross in reverse relief in the centre of the array. This is the most eye-catching element of the installation. It will attract attention and will be the focus of visual awareness of the change in appearance of the roof. It transforms the visual effect of the installation. Rather than seeing a bland rectangular black shape standing out from the traditional slate roof, on lookers will see first and foremost the proclamation of the building as a place of Christian worship.



- 3.4 The panels and the cross within them are sited with precise symmetry in respect of both vertical and horizontal aspects of the roof plane and the graceful windows on the south side of the building. A bold and attractive visual statement, rather than a featureless array of panels, will be the immediate and enduring visual impression. It is engaging rather than intruding due to the symbolic nature of the shape created within the array of panels. It will not be harmful to the historic nature of the building since it is highlighting the purpose and function of the building as a church, which is the most important aspect of its character.

- 3.5 This approach to the display of the panels changes the nature of the impact from potentially negative to potentially positive. The drawing of the proposed installation above shows clearly the effect of the design in creating a stunning large-scale cross proclaiming the nature of the building. If the on lookers also realize that the panels used to create the cross have not only symbolic value, but also have a laudable function to generate renewable energy, that will merely serve to underline the stance of Buxton Methodist Church on important environmental issues.
- 3.6 The Methodist church has a long and proud tradition of championing community and environmental issues and working to address known concerns. It is highly appropriate that it should incorporate a facility that reduces the carbon footprint of the operation of the church and at the same time allows it to continue to provide accommodation for a range of community groups and activities.

4 Visual Impact

- 4.1 While the visual impact is intended to be positive rather than negative and not regarded as in any way undesirable it should also be recognized that the roof section proposed is visible only from a limited part of the surrounding area.
- 4.2 Views of the roof from the area immediately around the church are restricted due to the shape of the church itself, with a projecting south facing gable and modern entrance / extension that masks the roof beyond, and the closeness of surrounding buildings. The photographs and site plan that follow illustrate the point.

Views of the Church Roof from surrounding streets



Torr Street. Partial view along the street



Full view at the junction with Chapel Street

Buxton Methodist Church Installation of Photovoltaic Panels



No view from the lower end of Chapel Street or from St James Terrace. Upper storeys of St James Terrace housing will have views



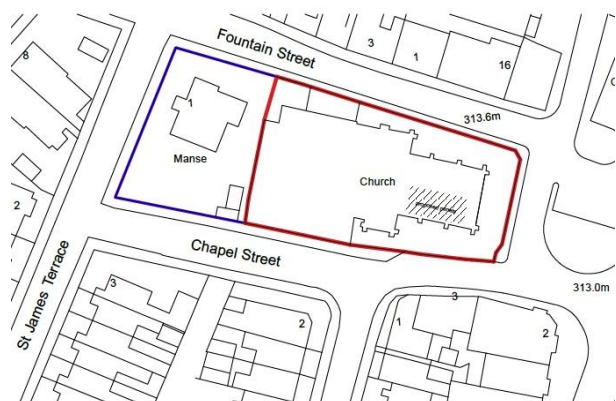
A partial view emerges along the footpath on the south side of Chapel Street. A full view is gained beyond the junction with Torr St.



Partial, oblique view from High Street at its junction with Chapel Street



No view from the south end of the Market Place due to the decorative brattishing



Views of the church from the Market Place are restricted to the north and eastern elevations. The panels would not be visible from the Market Place itself.

- 4.3 The houses along the east side of Torr Street have no views of the roof from any window. Those on the west side have an acutely angled view which would be available only from limited parts of the front facing rooms and restricted to the few houses towards the top (N) end of the street. Upper storeys of the houses on St James Terrace close to Chapel St will have an angled view of the Cross at some distance and not harmful in the wider appreciation of the conservation area.
- 4.4 The nature of traffic movements in Torr Street are also significant. The one-way traffic operation at the southern end of Torr Street means that access is only from the north. The great majority of traffic movements and parking are south facing. There are only two properties with on-plot parking. The road is narrow and turning in the carriageway is highly restricted. As a result virtually all vehicles exit Torr Street to the south. Movements to the north which would provide a partial view of the church building are observed to be very few indeed.
- 4.5 Torr Street is not a busy pedestrian thoroughfare, whether for visitors or residents of the town. High Street, with its extensive façade of shops is likely to be the preferred route to and from the market place and the rest of the town centre.
- 4.6 The view from High Street is limited entirely to the opening created by its junction with Chapel Street from where the view is partial and angled.

Conclusions

- 5.1 It has been demonstrated that the proposed panels will have no impact on the core heritage area around the Crescent, Old Hall, Opera House, Dome, Palace Hotel etc. and not be visible at all in any view that includes a listed building. The Heritage Impact Statement demonstrates that any perceived harm to heritage interests is outweighed by the community benefit. The environmental effect is wholly positive.
- 5.2 The panel array has been designed as a piece of public art by incorporating the symbol of the Cross in reverse relief in the centre of the smooth black frame created by the surrounding panels. It will form a stunning visual image proclaiming the purpose of the church as a place of worship and underlining the long association of the Methodist church with championing environmental issues.