

Planning Statement

Shinfield Community Church, Shinfield, Reading, RG2 9DL

**Proposed partial demolition of existing church and
associated buildings and replacement with new church
building, upgrade to existing building together with
reorganisation of parking area, landscaping and associated
site works**

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This planning statement has been prepared by Bluestone Planning on behalf of Shinfield Community Church, who are located in Shinfield, Reading, RG2 9DL. The proposed development seeks the partial demolition of the existing church and its associated buildings and their replacement with a new church building, several upgrades to the existing building that will be retained together with the reorganisation of the parking area, landscaping and associated works.
- 1.2 The Church has experienced a significant revival in the last ten years with the population of Shinfield village doubling in size between 2001 to 2021, and it has outgrown its current chapel building. Since June 2022, the weekly Sunday church service has meet at a local school due to the chapel building not being able to provide sufficient space for the congregation (average 60 adults and 15 children) that regularly attend the service.
- 1.3 Shinfield Community Church is very involved in the community and provides a wide variety of events and services to the community at large. The events range from Breakfast Services for special Sundays (ie. Mothering Sunday, Harvest, Pancake Sunday, etc.), charity cafes where all proceeds go to a local, national or international charity, and Rainbow Tots where parents, carers, and children can go to meet others on a weekly basis. The church also runs a weekly Share foodbank and cafe, which serves around 50 families each week. This is highly valued by Shinfield Parish Council.
- 1.4 Other community services include Josimah Baby Bank, which provides baby essentials to those located in Wokingham and Reading Borough, services in residential homes which allows those with mobility and transport issues to enjoy a worship service, together with a number of youth and prayer groups. The current proposals will provide a larger space for these events and services to expand and create more opportunities.
- 1.5 This application is accompanied by the following planning documents:
- Application forms and certificate of ownership, signed and dated
 - Planning Drawings
 - SHIN 05 001 – Location Plan and List of Drawings
 - SHIN 05 002 – Existing Site Survey Plan
 - SHIN 05 103 – Combined Ground Floor and First Floor Survey Plan
 - SHIN 05 113 – Existing Roof Plan
 - SHIN 05 120 – Existing South West Elevation
 - SHIN 05 121 – Existing North East Elevation
 - SHIN 05 122 – Existing South East Elevation
 - SHIN 05 123 – Existing North West Elevation

- SHIN 05 124 – Existing North East House Elevation
- SHIN 05 130 – Site Demolition Plan
- SHIN 05 131 – Ground Floor Demolition Plan
- SHIN 06 001 – Proposed Block Plan
- SHIN 06 003 – Proposed Site Plan
- SHIN 06 111 – Proposed Ground Floor Plan
- SHIN 06 112 – Proposed First Floor Plan
- SHIN 06 113 – Proposed New Roof Plan
- SHIN 06 120 – Proposed South West Elevation
- SHIN 06 121 – Proposed North East Elevation
- SHIN 06 122 – Proposed South East Elevation
- SHIN 06 123 – Proposed North West Elevation
- SHIN 06 901 – Proposed Landscaping Plan
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- Statement of Need
- Design and Access Statement
- Shinfield Church Vision
- Drainage Strategy – 2311334 – ACS – XX – XX – T – C – RP01 Rev C01
- CCTV Drainage Report – GEO-014-Rev 1
- Preliminary Ecological Assessment – Eco3634b
- Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation – Eco3634b
 - Biodiversity Metric
- LSBUD Enquiry – 37028662
- SSL Desk Study
- Desk Study and Preliminary Risk Assessment – 738282 – 1 (00)
- Transport Statement – 2517REP01 Rev C
 - 2311134-ACS-XX-XX-DP-C-9300 C01 - Car Park Layout
 - 2311134-ACS-XX-XX-DP-C-9390 C01 – Vehicle Swept Path Analysis

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The following section outlines the timeline of Shinfield Community Church and the development of the site since it was originally acquired in 1910. The site is comprised of two plots, the original church (outlined in green) and the neighbouring former bungalow (outlined in purple).



Figure 1: Aerial view of site (Google Maps)

- 2.2 The original church, hereafter referred to as '*the chapel building*', was acquired in 1910 as land '*to be used for religious worship by a Church*' as stated in the Trust Deed / Conveyance. The former bungalow, hereafter referred to as the '*support hub*', was purchased in 1986 and has since been used in conjunction with the Church for related purposes under use class F1(f). The chapel building was extended with the addition of a hall on the 1970s, and the two buildings were subsequently linked by a single storey structure in the early 1990s, which still connects them today.
- 2.3 Today the site contains the extended chapel building, car park and support hub, together with a small rear garden to the north of the chapel building. The facility is located on the corner of Hollow Lane and Fairmead Road in a centrally-located, residential area within the village of Shinfield.

3 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 Shinfield Community Church has no recent planning history, with only three applications dating before 1998 which are only available on microfiche records at Wokingham Borough Council offices.

3.2 Applications dated before 1998: -

- 07802 – Church Hall (outline) at Fairmead Road / Hollow Lane, Shinfield – **Permitted 16th March 1978**
- 36930 – Erection of a glazed link between existing Church hall and adjacent church owned bungalow – **Permitted 17th January 1991**
- 37237 – Change of use of bungalow to partial church related uses - **Permitted 17th April 1991**

3.3 Section 55(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) defines development as *‘the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land.’*

3.4 Section 171B(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act advises that *“in the case of any other breach of planning control, no enforcement action may be taken after the end of the period of ten years beginning with the date of the breach.”*

3.5 Although planning permission 37237 permitted the partial change of use of the former bungalow to church use in 1991, in practice it has been fully used for church purposes since 1998 (ie over 25 years) and that use continues to the present day. For example, today it provides space for Sunday Schools, food bank storage and office accommodation for the Pastors.

3.6 25 years is considerably in excess of the time limits for planning enforcement by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) in accordance with section 171B(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), and the support hub can therefore be concluded to be in lawful church use within use class F1.

3.7 Positive pre-application advice (ref: 241088) was received from the LPA in connection with the proposals on 19th June 2024. The planning officer that was allocated to provide pre-application advice concluded that:

“In summary, the proposed new church building would have an acceptable impact on the character of the area and on the neighbouring properties. The scheme is considered to accord with national and local policy and therefore would be likely to received support at planning officer level.”

4 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The proposal seeks to demolish the support hub and the dining hall, due to both the dilapidated condition of the support hub and the lack of space within the buildings generally. These structures will be replaced by a new open, flexible multi-use space that will be used equally as worship and community activity space. There will be W/Cs to the north and a covered main entrance with a servery to the south. A first floor office and planting will be provided at the northern end of the new building, with obscurely glazed windows looking north.
- 4.2 A new single-storey link will be built to connect the existing Chapel building to the new worship space. This new link will house a disabled toilet and store, serving the chapel building. The layout of the chapel building will remain the same, however building works will take place inside in order to refurbish and upgrade the space.
- 4.3 The proposed new building will be constructed within the footprint of the demolished structures and will provide an attractive worship space. The Statement of Need and Vision document provide further details about the community activities and services that the Church provides today, and the plans it has for the future.
- 4.4 The proposed elevations and floorplans highlight the design and character of the proposed development, which will be in-keeping with the character of the locality and complementary to the chapel building.
- 4.5 The proposed site plan demonstrates that the site can accommodate parking for up to 16 cars to the front of the building, including the provision of three disabled parking bays. A further two vehicular parking spaces are located to the rear of the hall. Cycle and pushchair parking is also provided to in the southern corner of the site. Works to the external areas of the site will introduce additional landscape planting, and new areas of hard landscaping around the perimeter of the new church building. The width of the existing site access will be reduced on the Fairmead Road frontage and new planting will be introduced.
- 4.6 The new facility will provide much needed space for the growing congregation and local community. As the Need Statement that accompanies this Statement notes:

“In conversation with local residents, groups and agencies in the area to assess local needs and interest we have established that there is strong support for our scheme and a real desire to see more and better facilities in Shinfield. There is a need for more space

for activities for young families and the elderly in particular, youth and health projects, advice work and counselling for example. We would seek to offer or work with local organisations to address these needs.

Our new building will meet many of these needs and we believe it will be a major asset in the community, providing a more attractive and useful space than we have at present. We plan to retain and refurbish the original chapel building and demolish the bungalow and build a large hall in its place that will be multi-functional. These will provide:

- A large hall for meetings and concerts, youth and children's activities as well as worship, also available for community events*
- A café area open at times throughout the week for people to drop in and meet their friends and to host our coffee mornings*
- A smaller hall for use by our youth and children's groups, also available for community events"*

4.7 The design and access statement that accompanies this application explains that the floor areas of existing and proposed buildings are 277.3m² and 375.28m² respectively, which results in a 35% increase only. It is considered that that the new layout will make efficient use of space that currently is not utilised by the existing layout. Accordingly, it should be viewed as an improvement to the existing situation.

4.8 It goes on to explain that the structural posts for the new building will be clad in masonry, and plastered and painted, as will be the lintels. There will be warm-coloured face brick panels in between, and the gables will be brick-faced. The entrance will be through painted masonry portals. The Fairmead Road gable will contain a ground to ridge strip of window, covered by louvres, which will add attractive light to the interior, and provide a striking vertical feature.

5 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy

- 5.1 The Government's policy on planning matters is primarily contained in the National Planning Policy Framework ('the NPPF') the revised version of which was published in December 2024 and amended in February 2025.
- 5.2 The paragraphs which are considered to be of relevance to this submission are the following: -
- Paragraph 8 – Achieving sustainable development
 - Paragraph 98 – Promoting healthy and safe communities
 - Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
 - Paras. 164 and 166 – Planning for climate change
 - Paragraph 200 – Agent of Change Principle

Faith Groups and the Planning System Policy Briefing

- 5.3 The 'Faith Groups and the Planning System Policy Briefing' ¹(October 2015) makes a number of recommendations including urging local planning authorities to develop greater understanding of how faith groups use space, which includes recognition of the differences between and within faith groups themselves.
- 5.4 To facilitate this, specific guidance on how faith groups use space needs to be made available, the briefing explains, e.g., through supplementary planning documents that reflect the contemporary religious landscape. Generating such guidance may benefit from collaboration with the relevant professional bodies and faith groups it goes on to explain.
- 5.5 Page 7 of the briefing paper examines the interaction of the planning system with faith and religion:

"As well as addressing how planning in its current form might be applied more flexibly, the FPN noted a number of areas of planning law and policy that might be reviewed, with a view to easing the difficulties faced by faith groups when dealing with the planning system. Where not detrimental to the wider public interest, we recommend the following:

- *Given the scarcity of non-residential premises (i.e. D1 use class) in many of our towns and cities, local planning authorities should prioritise protecting space for social infrastructure, including places of worship. This should also be a consideration in any future review of use classes.....*

¹ *Faith Groups and the Planning System*. Available at:
https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/faith_groups_and_the_planning_system-policy-briefing-final.pdf.

-Local planning authorities should assess the social infrastructure needs arising from new developments, including provision for places of worship. Such an approach will further enable local planning authorities to move towards a proactive mode of needs provision. For example, this might be achieved through a minimum space allocation per population beyond a certain trigger point, as has been seen in creative practice case studies (e.g. Cambridgeshire Horizons, 2008), and as is the case in other types of land use.” (Bluestone Planning emphasis)

5.6 The proposals are considered to be consistent with these ambitions.

Local Planning Policy

5.7 The site is within the Wokingham Borough Council area. The development plan comprises the Core Strategy (CS) adopted in January 2010, the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) document, adopted in February 2014, and the Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan (SNP), made in January 2017.

Core Strategy

5.8 The following policies from the CS are considered to be relevant to this proposal: -

- CP1 – Sustainable Development
- CP2 – Inclusive Communities
- CP3 – General Principles for Development
- CP7 – Biodiversity
- CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths SPA
- CP9 – Scale & Location of Development: Shinfield

Managing Development Delivery Document

5.9 The following policies from the MDD document are considered to be relevant to this proposal: -

- CC01: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC02: Development Limits
- CC03: Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
- CC04: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC07: Parking
- CC10: Sustainable Drainage
- TB04: Development in the vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), Burghfield
- TB22: Sites of Urban Landscape Value
- TB23: Biodiversity and Development

Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan

5.10 The following policies from SNP are considered to be relevant to this proposal: -

- Policy 1 – Location of Development
- Policy 2 – General Design Principles
- Policy 3 – Sustainable Development
- Policy 4 – Accessibility and Highways Safety
- Policy 7 – Biodiversity
- Policy 8 – Flooding

Draft Local Plan Update (2023-2040)

5.11 The emerging Local Plan Update (LPU) was submitted for examination on 28th February 2025. According to the examination website, the Planning Inspectors that were appointed to undertake the independent Examination submitted their Initial Questions (IQ) on 17th April 2025 and the Council requested for an extension to respond to these on 9th May 2025. Given the early stage of the LPU, it is considered that its draft policies attract limited weight in decision making. Notwithstanding this, the following draft policies are considered to be of some relevance to the proposal: -

- SS3 – Development within or adjacent to major and modest settlements
- SS7 – Development in the vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishments (AWE)
- CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings
- DH1 – Place Making and Quality Design
- DH2 – Safeguarding Amenity
- DH8 – Environmental Standards for non-residential Development
- HC1 – Promoting Healthy Communities
- HC2 – Community Infrastructure
- NE1 – Biodiversity and Nature Conservation
- NE2 – Biodiversity Net Gain

Other Relevant Planning Documents

5.12 The Council has a number of supplementary documents and guides which are also considered to be of relevance: -

- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD
- Borough Design Guide

6 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of and Need for Development

- 6.1 The proposal consists of a partial demolition and new build within the footprint of existing buildings, together with the upgrading of the existing chapel building. The site is located within the Development Limits of Shinfield according to the development plan Policy Map (see policies CP11, CC02 and policy 1).
- 6.2 Policy CP2 of the CS ensures that new development will contribute to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities. The development will offer improvements to an existing community facility that not only provides weekly church services, but also provides meeting space for toddler groups, Share foodbank, café, coffee morning for the elderly, holiday clubs, youth group, etc. The improved facilities will allow the church to expand on these services that contribute to the lives of the wider community.
- 6.3 Policies CP1 (CS) and Policy 3 (SNP) highlight the importance of sustainable development. The proposal seeks to improve the sustainability of the site through biodiversity enhancement, renovating the existing chapel building, and constructing a new building that meets the current sustainable construction standards (waste minimisation; low energy and water usage; high insulation levels etc).
- 6.4 The Need and Vision documents that have been submitted alongside this planning statement demonstrate there is a strong case for upgrading the facilities at Shinfield Community Church to meet modern worship requirements and the needs of the local community for additional services and activities. This is further supported by paragraph 98 of the NPPF and the emphasis that the Faith Groups and Planning briefing note places on valuing existing worship spaces and planning for new spaces where needed.
- 6.5 It is understood that based on the pre-application response, the LPA agrees that the whole of the site has been used as a Class F1 use for a period greater than 10 years. Therefore, the proposed development is considered to be in general conformity with adopted Local Plan policies CP1, CP11, CC02, policy 1, policy 3 and paragraph 98 of the NPPF.

Design and Visual Impact

- 6.6 Policy CP3 of the CS and Policy 2 of the SNP inform the general design principles of the area. Both policies outline the importance of development respecting the character of the area through scale, mass, materials, quality of design, etc.

- 6.7 The Borough Design Guide Principle NR1 highlights that non-residential development should respond to the existing local context and characteristics of the site. Principles NR2, NR3 and NR4 go on to inform that it should also contribute to the improvement of the character and quality of the area, create a positive arrival for people travelling by all modes of transport and as well as address the street.
- 6.8 The proposal has been developed so that it has a similar scale and massing to the existing buildings on site, thereby minimising the risk of giving rise to harm to the amenity or the surrounding area and neighbouring residential properties.
- 6.9 The pre-application response letter confirms that the proposed building height will not have a detrimental impact on the character of the area and the proposed materials and changes to the street facing elevations will be in keeping with the character of the area. Accordingly, the design is considered to be of high quality with the form and materials reflecting the character of the area, in accordance with policies CP3, Policy 2, and Principles NR1, NR2, NR3 and NR4 of the Borough Design Guide.

Amenity Impact

- 6.10 Policy CP3 of the CS highlights that proposals should not have a negative impact on the amenities of adjoining land users. As it was confirmed in the pre-application response, the proposed development is considered unlikely to have either a detrimental overbearing or loss of sunlight/daylight impact on any neighbouring properties.
- 6.11 The concerns raised in the pre-application letter in connection with potential overlooking issues have been addressed and obscure glazed windows are proposed to be installed on the first floor windows facing no. 8 Hollow Lane.
- 6.12 Accordingly, the proposed development is considered to be in accordance with adopted Local Plan policy CP3.

Access and Parking

- 6.13 The proposed access will be extended slightly to the south with the majority of the existing vehicular crossing being removed and the verge being reinstated. The existing wall is also proposed to be extended to reduce the total width of the vehicular access to 5m in order to provide a safer entrance into the church. The northeastern access is proposed to remain as existing. The primary vehicular and pedestrian access will continue to be from Fairmead Road. The existing gravel car park surface will be replaced with permeable paving.

- 6.14 The existing car park provides up to 26 parking spaces, whereas the proposed car park will provide 16 spaces (including disabled parking and EV charging point) and a further two spaces to the side of the chapel building. Therefore, 18 car parking spaces in total. 15 in According to the Wokingham Parking Standards Study Report (PSSR) and policy CC07 of the MDD, the upper limit requirement for car parking spaces for this type of development is 15. The proposed development is considered to be in compliance with the latest adopted parking standards and policy CC07 of the MDD.
- 6.15 Although the PSSR has not been updated since 2011, it provides a rough estimate for the required number of vehicular spaces. Additionally, parking studies were undertaken to determine the existing activity. At a typical Sunday service 21 cars were used to travel to the site, while during a 'Share' event the site accommodated a maximum of 25 parked cars.
- 6.16 The 18 parking spaces are considered sufficient for a majority of events. However, the Sunday Service and the Share event often require significant parking. Section 7.3 of the Transport Statement highlights opportunities to manage parking during peak time such as offering two services or requiring a booking system so as to stagger arrivals and departures to the site. A majority of the members of the Shinfield Community Church live within walking distance of the church and they are encouraged to walk or cycle whenever possible in accordance with the Travel Plan (Section 7.2).
- 6.17 The PSSR requires the provision of a minimum of 1 space per 15 visitors and 1 space per 5 members of staff. 3 Sheffield-type parking stands will be provided to the southwestern corner of the site which will accommodate 6 bicycles in total. Therefore, it is considered that the minimum cycling space requirements are met.
- 6.18 Subsequently, it is considered that the proposed development, including the additional cycle and pram parking, will promote sustainable travel and will create a new area that is safe, attractive and secure.

Biodiversity and Ecology

- 6.19 Policy CC03 of the MDD seeks to protect green infrastructure networks and existing trees. Eight trees are proposed along the site's boundary. A BNG Metric and Report have also been submitted alongside this application showing a BNG of +112.19% which is in accordance with Policy TB23 of the MDD.
- 6.20 The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) that accompanies this planning application states that the site is highly unlikely to affect any Great Crested Newts or any other

protected species. It is also recommended that the undertaking of works, such as demolition and vegetation, should be done outside of bird nesting season. The PEA also identified that the hall and bungalow had “low” potential to host roosting bats, and as a consequence a dusk emergence survey was carried out; however, no evidence of bats was found.

- 6.21 Therefore, the proposed development is considered to be in accordance with policy CC03 and TB23 of the MDD and Schedule 14 Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021.

Environmental Factors

- 6.22 According to the Government’s Flood Maps, the site is in Flood Zone 1, and therefore is at very low risk of flooding from fluvial sources.
- 6.23 Whilst the site may be at low to medium risk of surface water flooding, the existing car park surface material (gravel) will be replaced with a porous pavement that will allow water to drain as existing. Additionally, linear rain gardens and filter trenches are proposed to the rear of the property to provide biodiversity benefits as well as interception of runoff and a small amount of attenuation.
- 6.24 According to the desktop risk assessment that was carried out for the site, the likelihood of the land being contaminated is low. Therefore, no further investigation is considered to be necessary.
- 6.25 Policy TB04 of the MDD notes that the site is within the AWE B Outer Consultation Zone (OCZ) and further details of development are required if “*all residential or non-residential applications where 500 or more additional people may live, work, shop and/or visit.*” The proposed development will not conflict with policy, which is a position the LPA also accepted in their pre-app response. Accordingly, the proposed development is considered to not result in any adverse impacts on the environment.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Material planning considerations have been carefully considered and analysed, as evidenced in section 6 of this statement and the supporting plans and documents. It is considered the proposed development would contribute to the wider community providing a larger and more sustainable place.

- 7.2 The proposal will deliver significant environmental benefits by providing a net gain in biodiversity through the addition of 8 trees along the south boundary. This is a material consideration of significant weight due to the 112% increase, which is 11 times the minimum requirement.
- 7.3 The proposed development will also deliver significant social benefits by providing a better facility for the community. Additionally, a similar number of car parking spaces are proposed as well as more cycle spaces and pram parking to encourage its users to use active travel or public transit to get to the site due to its central location.
- 7.4 The economic benefits that will be provided by the proposed development, albeit limited, will also support the growth of the local area.
- 7.5 It is considered that the proposed scheme complies with relevant Core Strategy Policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP7, CP8 and CP9, as well as Management Development Delivery Policies CC01, CC02, CC03, CC04, CC07, CC10, TB04, TB22, and TB23 and it is further supported by the NPPF and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).
- 7.6 Drawing from all of the above, it is considered evident that the proposed development is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted Local Plan and in general compliance with the paragraphs of the NPPF and guidance set out in the NPPG. In addition, the proposed development will deliver social, economic and environmental benefits which also attract positive weight in decision making. Therefore, it is respectfully requested that the LPA considers this application in a positive light and work in a collaborative way with the applicant to facilitate the grant of the planning permission.
- 7.7 Should the application be permitted, the applicant is aware that suitably worded conditions may be attached to the decision, which meet the relevant tests. The applicant is happy to discuss these with the LPA during the processing of this application should that be necessary, so as to ensure that the wording of the suggested conditions is appropriate and does not unnecessarily delay works on site through front-loading of details via pre-commencement conditions.