St. Georges Church, 367-368, High Street, Brentford

Report by: Borough Planning Officer

1. PROPOSAL
Demolition of the former St. Georges Church (with the exception of the Tower), the retention, adaptation and use of the Sarah Trimmer hall for community purposes and the construction of a five storey building comprising 19 residential units.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS
That members comment on the application for consideration by Sustainable Development Committee

SITE
St Georges Church and the Sarah Trimmer building, High Street
Brentford. (Brentford)

SITE DESCRIPTION
The site of the former late Victorian St George's Church, occupied by the Musical Museum and adjoining Grade II Listed Building, Sarah Trimmer Hall that is within the ownership of the Diocese of London.

The site is approximately 0.16 ha., is roughly square in shape with the buildings occupying most of the area. Three small open areas exist, a triangular area bounded by the church, the High Street and the eastern boundary, another area on the High Street, between the two buildings, and a larger area of waste ground to the rear. The church, its tower and main entrance sit right on the back-edge-of-pavement to High Street. The main body of the church then runs at an angle to the street. The Church has been used for many years as a Musical Museum.

The Sarah Trimmer building is a single-storey oblong building with hipped roof that sits at the back-edge-of-pavement, a door leads directly onto the High Street. It is linked to the Church by ramshackle additions. Currently it is used by the Musical Museum for storage having been used as a photographic studio.
The site is surrounded by the development of the former British Gas site, developed as the Capital West development with a hotel to the west, a block of flats to the east that rises from five-storey adjacent to the church to seven-storey. Immediately to the rear is footpath cycle route a landscaped route that runs east west though the development. Facing on to the rear of the church some 41m is the eight-storey wing of the Capital West development.

Seven new housing association properties, the Green Dragon School and playing fields and Brentford Towers Estate are located to the north. The North Road Baptist Church and Haverfield Estate are located to the west. Further to the northeast and east of the site is land owned by Thames Water including a covered reservoir and operational buildings, the subject of separate planning applications and the Kew Bridge Steam Museum including a mixture of Grade I and II listed buildings. Immediately to the south of the site is the High Street, beyond, which are Watermans Park at a lower level and the River Thames. Brentford Ait is an island of semi natural vegetation with large trees, which provide a barrier between the site from the south bank of the River and the Thames towpath adjoining Kew Gardens.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

British Gas Site and Thames Water sites including the former St. George's Church
A planning brief was adopted combining the Thames Water, British Gas and former St George’s Church sites. That required that the site should be redeveloped in a comprehensive manner for mixed use including employment, residential, a new musical museum, a hotel, educational uses and open space.

British Gas Site
A residential led mixed-use scheme was given detailed planning permission on 27.06.01. It involved the erection of 232 residential units, a hotel and a new musical museum, albeit that the site of the existing museum is not within the application site. The legal agreement secured amongst many other matters the construction of a new museum to shell level.

The Area Committee at their meeting on 11 September 2003 approved revised details of the Musical Museum. Whilst the housing development and the Hotel had been completed the provision of the new Musical Museum was delayed.

The realisation of the development framework for the British Gas site saw the scheme for the Thames Water site, amended to reflect the joint framework. The approved outline permission was for the principle of residential development and the provision of open space on the site of an existing covered reservoir to the east and rear of the former British Gas Site.

A separate planning application was submitted for the Church site. It was recognised that as it is surrounded on three sides by the British Gas site
development the applicants needed to demonstrate that the church should not be left as a separate isolated development site, incapable of redevelopment. The scheme demonstrated that new development could take place, but the application was subsequently withdrawn.

**Thames Water Site.**
Outline planning permission was granted on the completion of the legal agreement that secured. Sustainable Development Committee approved details of the reserved matters on 30 May 2002. The scheme provides 353 flats, of which 104 are to be affordable, to be accommodated within nine blocks, designed around a central square, that will range in height from six to sixteen storeys incorporating basement level car parking.

It is understood that the reason that development has not commenced is because of the difficulties associated with the decommissioning of the reservoir on the site. An integral part of the legal agreement is the promotion of employment uses on the site of the occupied TW utilities operation. Whilst an application was submitted, it was subsequently withdrawn.

**00657/B/P15**

**DETAILS**
The application is supported by:
- Planning statement
- Traffic assessment
- A Design statement

The proposals involve the demolition of the main body of St Georges Church, whilst retaining the tower as a pedestrian entranceway. Sarah Trimmer Hall is to be retained for community use, with minor alterations proposed to enable this use. The additions that link the Hall to the Church will be demolished and the Hall restored.

The main body of the Church is to be demolished whilst retaining the tower, the works to the tower would involve the building of new walls at ground level to support the tower, to replace the loss of structural support currently provided by the Church.

The proposed building, for 19 flats, consists of a four-storey block with a recessed fifth floor. It proposes 6 one-bedroom, 10 two-bed and 3 three-bed flats. A basement car park, with access from the basement to the adjoining block to the east, would provide car parking for 16 cars, refuse enclosure and lift and stair access to the upper floors.

The building would be sited at the rear of the site some 21m. to the High Street, 6m. from the rear of the Hall and 13.5m. from the rear of the retained tower.

The basement car park would sit proud of the ground level, to allow for natural ventilation, and the land in front of the building will rise towards the building such that the ground floor of the building is some 1.5m above street level (a similar construction technique to the Capital West development). This area will be landscaped in formal way, with planter beds in a paved courtyard.
CONSULTATIONS
The application has been advertised as a major development, alterations to a listed building, and development affecting the setting of a listed building. Adjoining residents in the Holland Gardens estate (236 properties); North Road, Distillery Road and Pottery Road, have been notified. The Holland Gardens residents Association and a number of the residents have objected to the scheme. They are concerned about; loss of the building of townscape character; the impact on views of the Thames; impact on traffic and parking within the estate; the impact on the listed building, overlooking and loss of outlook; that the site has been used for burials.

POLICY

PPG1 (General Policy and Principles) states that the appearance of any proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings are material considerations in determining planning applications and appeals. PPG1 also sets out the three themes that underpin the Government’s approach to the planning system, those being sustainable development, mixed use and urban design. It also states that LPAs should allocate the maximum amount of housing to previously developed sites within existing urban areas which have access to a range of transport and other facilities and to provide a mixture and range of types of housing to meet the increasingly varied types of housing requirements including the need for affordable housing.

Government planning guidance on housing is contained within PPG 3 Housing(Planning Policy Guidance March 2000)
Local Authorities should:
• Plan to meet the housing requirements of the whole community, including those in need of affordable housing;
• Provide wider housing opportunity and choice and a better mix in the size and type and location of housing than is currently available, and seek to create mixed communities;
• Provide sufficient housing land but give priority to re-using previously developed land within urban areas, bringing empty homes back into use and converting existing buildings, in preference to the development of green field sites;
• Create more sustainable patterns of development by building in ways which exploit and deliver accessibility by public transport to jobs, education and health facilities, shopping, and leisure and local services;
• Make more efficient use of land by reviewing planning policies and standards;
• Place the needs of people before ease of traffic movement in designing the layout of residential developments;
• Seek to reduce car dependence by facilitating more walking and cycling, by improving linkages by public transport between housing, jobs, local services and local amenity, and by planning for mixed use; and
• Promote good design in new housing developments in order to create attractive, high-quality living environments in which people will choose to live.
PPG15 (Planning and the Historic Environment)

Section 16 of the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act require authorities considering applications for planning permission to have special regard to preserving the setting of a listed building. The setting of a building may often include land some distance from it. Where a listed building forms an important visual element in the street, it would probably be right to regard any development in the street as being within the setting of the building.

PPG15 also states that the desirability of preserving or enhancing the area should also be a material consideration.

'What is important is not that new buildings should directly imitate earlier styles, but that they should be designed with respect for their context, as part of a larger whole which has a well-established character and appearance of its own'.

PPG16 (Archaeology and Planning) states that developers and local authorities should take into account archaeological considerations and that LPA's can expect developers to provide the results of such assessments and evaluations as part of their application for sites where there is good reason to believe there are remains of archaeological importance. In cases when planning authorities have decided that planning permission may be granted but wish to secure the provision of archaeological excavation and recording the remains, it is open to them to do so by the use of negative condition.

The London Plan
Policy 2A.1 Sustainability criteria (p38)
Policy 4B.1 Design principles for a compact city (p173)
Policy 4B.6 Sustainable design and construction (p179)
Policy 4B.7 Respect local context and communities (p180)
Policy 4B.1 Design principles for a compact city (p173)
Policy 4B.3 Maximising the potential of sites
Policy 4C.1 The strategic importance of the Blue Ribbon Network (p195)
Policy 4C.25 Thames Policy Area
Policy 4C.24 Importance of the Thames (p212)
Policy 3D.9 Metropolitan Open Land (p144)
Policy 4B.11 Heritage conservation

UDP Proposals Schedule

M11- Proposal
Mixed development of employment and residential uses together with a new musical museum and public open space. The employment element of the site would also be suitable for hotel or educational uses. Provision of affordable housing should be in accordance with Policy H.2.1
Thames Policy Area

IMP 1.1 Integrating patterns of land use and the provision of transport.
IMP 1.2 The re-use and re-cycling of urban land and buildings.
IMP 2.1A Regeneration and enhancement of town centres.
IMP 3.1 Brentford Regeneration Area.
IMP 5.1 High Quality building and urban design
IMP 5.2 Thames Policy area.
IMP 6.1 Planning Obligations
ENV-N 1.5 Protection of Metropolitan Open Land
ENV-N 1.7 Development near Metropolitan Open Land
ENV-N 1.15 Heritage Land
ENV-N 1.16 Historic Parks and Gardens
ENV-N 2.6 Landscape Features
ENV-N 2.10 Green Chains
ENV-B 1.1 New Development
ENV-B 1.2 High buildings or structures affecting sensitive areas
ENV-B 1.3 High buildings in areas other areas
ENV-B 1.5 Environmental Improvements
ENV-B 1.6 Public Art
ENV-B 1.8 Access and facilities for people with disabilities
ENV-B 1.9 Safety and security
ENV-B 2.3 Reuse of redundant historic buildings
ENV-B 2.4 Demolition of listed buildings
ENV-B 2.5 Development affecting the setting of a listed building
ENV-B 2.8 Views and Landmarks
ENV-B 1 Viewpoints and landmarks identifies at E.Musical Museum (former St Georges Church)
ENV-P 1.2 Water pollution
ENV-P 1.3 Surface water run off
ENV-P 1.4 Waste water management
ENV-P 1.8 Development proposals on or near contaminated land
ENV-P 2.4 Recycling facilities in new developments
E.2.1 Environmental criteria
E.2.2 Mixed Uses
E.3.1 Disabled access.
H.1.1 Location of new housing development
H.2.1 Affordable Housing
H.4.1 Housing standards and guidelines
H.4.2 Residential density
H.4.3 Residential Mix
H.4.4 Provision for children’s play in housing developments
H.4.5 Associated facilities for residential developments
H.5.1 Housing for people with disabilities
H.7.1 Supported Housing
C.1.4 New Social and Community Facilities.
C.2.1 Educational facilities
C.4.1 Facilities for young children
C.4.3 Physical access to social and community facilities
T.1.1 The location of development
The Development Plan
The adopted UDP identifies the British Gas and former St George's Church site (M11) for a mixed use development of employment and residential uses and a new musical museum. It states that the employment element of the site would also be suitable for hotel and educational uses and that the proposal would involve the suitable re-use of the Church. Policy IMP.1.1 states the Council will pursue the objective of regeneration of Brentford Town Centre and Riverside through maximising the potential of the centre’s Thames side location by opening up those frontages to improve access to the riverside and encouraging a high quality of design and providing full public access to the built environment.

Since adoption of the first UDP the boundaries of the M11 mixed-use development site have been expanded to include the Thames Water land adjoining in the UDP Review Deposit, that became the adopted UDP in December 2003.

It seeks a mixed development of employment and residential uses together with a new musical museum and public open space. The employment element of the site would also be suitable for hotel or educational uses. Provision of affordable housing should be in accordance with policy H.2.1 (Reference is also made to the Town Centre Action Plan and the planning brief)

The adopted planning brief also covers the whole area and is a material consideration.

PLANNING ISSUES
Compliance with the planning brief
Demolition of Building of townscape
Impact on character of the area –Thames Landscape.
Impact on listed building
Density
Impact on adjoining residents
Access traffic and parking
Landscape and setting
Graves
Planning obligations
• Landscape/open space
• Refurbishment of listed building
• Education

Compliance with the planning brief
The planning brief and UDP (Review Deposit) proposal identifies the British Gas, former St George's Church and the Thames Water site as a single development site. The planning brief states that the area should ideally be developed comprehensively and that if any application is submitted for only part of the site it should be accompanied by an agreed (by the major landowners and local authority) master plan showing how it would fit into the overall development of the whole site. Two of the key sites have the benefit of planning permission, with the British Gas developed and completed, with the new musical museum nearing completion to shell finish. The scheme in its master plan for the area, and in the subsequent application for the church demonstrated that that concept of comprehensive treatment sought by the brief was capable of being met.
The musical museum is to be relocated, and if the basic premise of the applicant is correct then redevelopment, retaining the tower seems to be the best option. A new residential development with an alternative use for the listed building would seem to have merit. Particularly if it brings about a long-term future for the Hall and the Tower.
The agents for the London Diocesan Fund have confirmed that the local parish of St Pauls will use it for their community activities.

Demolition of Building of townscape
St Georges Church is identified as a building of Townscape Character and Policy Env-B 2.6 seeks to protect such buildings and their setting. The application proposes retaining the tower whilst demolishing the main body of the Church. It is the applicant’s case that the church cannot be retained in its entirety and that independent ‘vitality assessment’ concluded that it is beyond economic repair.
The history of the church is certainly unusual. It was built in 1887 with the nave and south aisle, but the intended north aisle was never built. It was constructed in brick and faced with Kentish ragstone except for the west elevation (the intended north aisle) that is faced in brick. The tower was added in 1913 and had only a short life as a church as it closed in 1959. The musical museum took occupation in 1963. The museum started by, and continues to be run by enthusiasts have only been able to slow down the decay of the building and it is in poor condition. Its long-term future once the museum vacate the building does not bode well. The church has modest floorspace of some 525 sq.m. It is not of sufficient quality to warrant inclusion in the statutory list of buildings of either historic or architectural interest.
Whilst having local interest its wider value has been consistently referred to because of its position on the Thames.
Impact on character of the area
There are two elements to this and they relate to the immediate character and its wider function within the Thames Landscape Strategy. The site is framed by the development of Capital West that are 5, 6 and 8 storey with 12 storey within the development. The design of that development is striking and modern with materials that reflect that design. A strong white pediment and terracotta panels and the towers expressed in white. The adjoining hotel has somewhat strident blue colour as its theme. The church is valued as a landmark building with extensive views along the river. The tower that is the strongest feature is being retained.

Impact on listed building
The description contained with the listing states;

The listed building is dwarfed by the Church and is in poor condition showing signs of long periods of neglect. The structure linking it to the church appears incongruous and unsightly, its removal can only add to the setting of the Hall.

The new building would be located to the rear of the site and will have a siting that is reflected in the adjoining Hotel site. Whilst simple in plan form the building gives space to the hall and the Tower and seems to serve as a backdrop framing both retained buildings.

Any new development must be carefully designed to preserve the setting of the building and be of an appropriate design scale, height, massing and alignment with the use of appropriate materials.

The building has white render, grey terracotta tiles, timber and glass. The design has strong similarities with Capital West whilst having a simpler range of materials that would not detract from the clear strong lines of the Hall or the Tower.

Access traffic and parking
The development proposes 16 parking spaces for 19 units for the flats with access through the adjoining development. A separate parking space served directly onto the Capital West development is provided for the Hall. This represents a nominal increase in the traffic generation for that development.

Density
In terms of density the provision of 19 units with 54 habitable rooms gives a net density of 340 habitable rooms per hectare. Whilst the Thames water site had 353 units with 908 habitable rooms on a site of 1.968ha (461HRPH), and on the neighbouring Capital West Site (639HRPH). The UDP recognises that density standards are a useful tool, but that it will be of
secondary importance after taking the account of the individual requirements of each site. Higher densities are appropriate when taking account of the established density and where it can be achieved within a high quality environment for predominantly non-family accommodation. It will be considered in town centre locations, areas of good public transport accessibility, or in locations where there is no established residential character. Furthermore policy IMP1.2 comments on the re-use and recycling of urban land and buildings at higher densities to make more efficient use of the space. This would be achieved on this site.

**Landscape and setting**
The design and use of the materials to the courtyard in front of the building will require greater emphasis and detail than currently shown particularly the change in levels proposed.

There is a strong landscape structure in the Capital west development to the rear.

**Burials**
During the period when the Church was in use burials within the area apparently took place. The evidence would suggest that they were exhumed and re-buried elsewhere. Current procedures where burials are to be found require Home Office approval and a somewhat complex legal position occurs that are generally outside the remit of planning. Although the use of the land and any potential contamination is a planning consideration.

**Potential 106 obligations.**
At 19 units the development would not of itself trigger the application of affordable housing. The development provides amenity space for itself but would probably trigger the need for contribution towards public open space. There is a need for contributions towards secondary school places.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Papers:</th>
<th>This report has been or is due to be considered by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listed buildings</td>
<td>IBAC – 15 July 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>History planning files for British gas and Thames Water sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Planning Brief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**This report is relevant to the following wards/areas:** Brentford