

**Ref:** 2020-055079 **Church:** Whitburn  
**Diocese:** Durham **Archdeaconry:** Sunderland  
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**Status:** Pre-formal consultation review

## Statement of Significance

The file has been uploaded separately.

### **Section 1: The church in its urban / rural environment.**

#### **1.1 Setting of the Church**

Whitburn Parish Church dates back to the 12th century, although it has been modified and up-graded over subsequent years with the most substantial works being carried out during the Victorian era.

The tower walls, where we are proposing further works, contains materials dating back to the 13th century; certainly most visible on the external south wall.

The church serves a local population of around 8,000 people and has a regular weekly congregational attendance, pre-COVID, of 75. The age structure of the congregation for most of the year is skewed towards the 60-90 year-old age group, although there are a number of times during the year when this is different especially at family services and when the local schools utilise the building for their own services of worship.

The Diocesan assigned architect has observed upon the very good state of maintenance of the building, the churchyard and the Lychgate. The churchyard is 'closed' and is under the maintenance control of the local authority, the Borough of South Tyneside Council.

The building is set to the southern edge of the village of Whitburn and is accessible from the village by a road and footpath through to the end of what is called 'Church lane', opening on to an area of parkland and open fields beyond the church site.

#### **1.2 The Living Churchyard**

The churchyard itself is a 'closed' graveyard and is visible from the lane. It is a peaceful place where visitors and locals often stop for reflection. The churchyard has a full range of trees, many of which are under preservation orders and some that are not. Although the responsibility for its maintenance is held by the local authority, members of the Gardening Club regularly tidy up leaves, debris and litter to ensure its good state of presentation.

#### **1.3 Social History**

Whitburn village is believed to date back to the same time as the church yet has expanded over the years, most significantly: pre- First and Second World wars and again since the 1960's. The church has continued to feature as a point of stability and a focus for worship. The nearby Parish Hall is seen as a community and a faith-based facility where a wide range of local groups have met over the years. There have been two-way 'spin-offs' for both the church and the community from this.

## **1.4 The church building in general**

Historically and spiritually significant to the area, the church building hides its long history in a dressing of Victorian influence in terms of structural shape and internal furnishing. The graveyard contains visible burial stones from the 18th century until its closure. More recently a series of Memorial stones have been placed, after faculty permission was granted, along a designated areas near the north and south walls to the graveyard.

Whitburn Parish Church forms an imposing sight on Church lane, while the tower is recognisable for miles around.

## **1.5 The church building in detail**

The building has a traditional east-west aligned nave which follows a slightly skewed line towards the choir and altar. The main access to the church is via a porch added in the Victorian period yet containing some stone work features of medieval and later origin. The main nave consists of three sections of vaulted ceilings covering the three main aisles. The internal woodwork of the choir and altar sanctuary are also a Victorian addition. The Victorian organ room and housing was removed in the 1990's to facilitate a kitchen/ preparation area with Upper office/ meeting space to the north and separate from the choir. A free-standing organ now resides in the north east corner of the church in part of the North aisle.

Capable of accommodating up to 140 people seated across three aisles, two central aisles with Victorian pews, a south aisle containing a Lady Chapel and more recently constructed pews and a north aisle with open space suitable for adding chairs.

The tower has two storeys and contains two functioning bells on the upper storey and a functioning and well maintained clock on the first floor. The lower two metres of plasterwork on the ground floor were removed in 2019 by faculty permission to allow for investigative work around resolving damp and draught problems in the church tower. Following the investigative work it was found that condensation, rather than rising or falling damp, was exacerbated by the constitution of the wall materials added following a re-plastering in the 1990's. It has been recommended that the walls be re-surfaced with a lime-based plaster which will allow the walls to 'breathe'. Part of the recent faculty permission also involved insulation of the first floor of the tower to reduce draught and falling cold air.

## **1.6 Contents of the Church**

There are few contents in the church of any monetary value and any sacramental utensils used are stored in a safe when not in use.

## **1.7 Significance for mission**

Whitburn Parish Church has served the community well over the years as a centre for worship and mission. It has worked on a range of outreach schemes to and with others in the community. Targeting different groups our work includes a young peoples' weekly Hot Chocolate club, a monthly Men's Breakfast, a weekly lunch club, a monthly Messy Church and regular church and school joint services. During the recent pandemic, a network on contact and support has been established among our own church community and in conjunction with local schools to extend the reach of a local food bank and to reassure the elderly and those living alone. The church has a long tradition of supporting and leading worship through the use of instrumental and choral music involving highly competent organists and a choir. Services are supplemented from time to time by contributions from local school choirs and musicians.

We are continually reviewing our mission to extend the impact we have as Christ's body here on earth.

## **Section 2 : The significance of the area affected by the proposal.**

### **2.1 Identify the parts of the church and/or churchyard which will be directly or indirectly affected by your proposal.**

The ground floor of the church tower will be immediately affected although, the benefits of the work undertaken will impact upon the rest of the inside of the church heating in terms of reduction of dampness and draught.

### **2.2 Set out the significance of these particular parts.**

The proposal is to reinstate breathable walling, to allow any moisture passing into or through the wall to escape to atmosphere, protecting the structure from further deterioration, and improving the internal vestry space.

We propose that the existing hot water heating system be extended in two legs, one from the south aisle and one from the north aisle each terminating in a quality and efficient radiator (Hudevad), to match the other Church radiators; fitted with an adjustable thermostatic valve, to provide low level background heating.

We propose that the pipework be routed via core-drilled holes at low level through the South east and North east corners of the Tower walls. This would require two 50 mm holes, drilled diagonally through the lower wall at a height commensurate with that of the existing radiator pipes to enter the base of the tower. The holes would be suitably filled and sealed in keeping with the existing plasterwork.

## **Section 3: Assessment of the impact of the proposals**

### **3.1 Describe and assess the impact of your proposal on these parts, and on the whole.**

The impact upon the immediate area to be worked upon would be to restore effectively an appropriate and effective 'breathable' plaster to the lower 2 metres of wall inside the ground floor of the tower. The installation of the pipes would involve the drilling of holes diagonally through walls from the places indicated into the ground floor of the tower.

Both stages of the work would not impact negatively on the weekly worship schedule as they can be arranged to take place during times when the church is not in use. A suitable cleaning schedule will be implemented to ensure that the fabric of the building is ready for use after the work has been completed.

We have received no objection to, or intention of supervision of the proposed work, from Historic England at this point despite sharing our detailed plans with them.

### **3.2 Explain how you intend, where possible, to mitigate the impact of the proposed works on the significance of the parts affected and the whole.**

Prior to the finalisation of our proposals a series of planning meetings were arranged to allow discussion between our architect and the representatives from the building company and the drilling company.

We have carried out an Options Appraisal on the best way to extend the radiator pipes to feed into the tower radiators:

In the options considered, pipes would need to be continued from the two existing radiators (one situated on the west wall of the south aisle and one on the north aisle), to feed into and return from the proposed radiators in the tower.

The first option would be to extend pipework fixed to the wall out of the choir vestry and around the support arches either at ground or above ground level and then through the wooded screen to enter the north side of the base of the tower. The second pipe would be fixed in a similar way to the wall extending from the radiator underneath 'The Fish Window' on the west wall the support arches and then through the wooden screen to enter the south side of the tower.

The second option would be to drill two 50 mm holes diagonally through the lower wall at a height commensurate with that of the existing radiator pipes to enter the base of the tower. The holes would be suitably filled and sealed in keeping with the existing plasterwork.

Given that the age of the tower in places is circa 13th century covered by Victorian plasterwork on the walls of the body of the church and would enter the tower through either the stonework or soon to be rendered lime-based plaster, we would be mindful that any such drilling would require care and attention.

It is our conclusion that, notwithstanding the age of the tower walls and their significance in both an architectural and historical context, with due care and attention to detail, the most cost-effective and least detrimental to the fabric and historical presentation of the building would be to drill 2x 50mm holes at a diagonal. This would avoid the unsightly presence of pipework around the base of the internal wall and arch supports.

The re-plastering of the tower will be an improvement. A suitable and architect-recommended company will carry out this work.

The hole -drilling will cause minimal intrusion into the walls and the ground surrounding it,

A suitably experienced company will be employed to carry out this process.

Work will take place under the supervision of one of the churchwardens and during the times when the church building is not in use.

## **Sources consulted**

Dan Spraggon

Durham diocese DAC

Archdeacon Bob Cooper

Tony Barnes, B3 Architects

Hepple Property Care

Diamond Drilling

Historic England

## **Plan**



## **Interior**

## **Exterior**