

SUBJECT **DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION REPORTS** **ITEM 9**
REPORT OF Head of Planning & Building Control

APPLICATION NO. [P07/W1302](#)
APPLICATION TYPE FULL
REGISTERED 13.11.2007
PARISH WALLINGFORD
WARD MEMBER(S) Mr Imran Lokhon

Mr Marcus Harris
APPLICANT Incumbent & Church Warden
SITE St-Mary-Le-More Church Market Place Wallingford
PROPOSAL Construction of disabled ramp to main entrance & lowering of tombstone.
AMENDMENTS As clarified by Design & Access Statement received 21 January 2008.
GRID REFERENCE 460709/189321
OFFICER Miss S Bird

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application has been referred to Planning Committee as the Planning Officer's recommendation differs from the views of the Town Council.
- 1.2 St Mary Le More Church is a Grade II* listed church characterised by knapped flint with stone dressing. It is located at the centre of Wallingford's Market Place within the Wallingford Conservation Area. It sits behind the Grade I listed Town Hall. A site location plan is **attached**.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal seeks full planning permission to construct a disabled access ramp to serve the front entrance of the Church. The ramp would be 3.8m in length with a gradient of 1:12, leading up to a platform area into the Church. A small flight of two steps would be incorporated to the front and opposite side of the platform area and hand railings would be inserted at necessary points.
- 2.2 The proposal also involves the lowering of a tombstone adjacent to the ramp by

approximately 25cm so that it lies flush with the ground.

2.3 Plans showing the proposal are **attached**. A Design and Access Statement submitted to accompany the application is also **attached**.

3.0 CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

3.1 **English Heritage (South East)** – The application should be determined in accordance with nation and local policy and on the basis of The Council's specialist conservation advice.

Conservation Officer (SWE) – No objections subject to conditions.

Environmental Health – No objections subject to conditions associated with potential disturbance of human remains.

Building Control – No objections.

County Archaeological Services – No objections subject to an archaeological watching brief.

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings – No objections subject to archaeological supervision and details of the paving.

Ancient Monuments Society – Considers that the option not involving the lowering of the tombstone would keep more of the character of the present churchyard.

Wallingford Town Council – Objects to the lowering of the tombstone and recommends the application be refused.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 P07/W1330 – Construction of disabled ramp to main entrance – Planning permission granted 24 January 2008.

This application proposed an identical access ramp but omitted the lowering of the tombstone from the scheme. This application was supported by the Town Council and was consequently determined under delegated powers.

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

5.1 Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 – Policies G2, G6, D1, D7, CON5, CON7, CON13, EP1.

South Oxfordshire Adopted Design Guide.

PPG15.

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The main considerations in this application are:

- 1) Impact on the setting of the listed building and character of the conservation area
- 2) The accessibility implications associated with the proposal
- 3) Impact on archaeology

6.2 Impact on the Setting of the Listed Building and Conservation Area

The proposal lies within the grounds of the C12th-C13th Church of St Mary Le More. The Chancel walls are dated to the C12th-C13th and the tower to c.1653. The main part of the church itself was rebuilt in 1854 by David Brandon with some 20th Century restoration. The building is Grade II* listed and is characterised by a knapped flint exterior with stone dressings. The property also lies within the Wallingford Conservation Area at the centre of the Market Place and immediately to the south of the Grade I listed Town Hall.

The Church is bounded by a low, medieval wall, which surrounds the north end of the church. The proposed ramp would be sited within the churchyard to the front (north) of the building, rising from east to west to meet the main entrance porch. The existing paving outside the front door of the church is modern, crazy paving, dating to the 1970s, such that the ramp would not disturb any historic pavements. The ramp would be relatively small set against the church and the railings would be conditioned to ensure that the whole structure is as unobtrusive as possible. As the church is set immediately behind the Town Hall, any views of the proposal would be partly obscured.

The ramp itself has already been granted permission under P07/W1330 and the only difference in this current application is the proposal to lower an existing tombstone adjacent to the ramp. The tombstone is located to the east of the ramp and is set on a modern brick plinth. Dates on the tombstone place the initial carving on the stone to the 1800s. In order to allow a clearer approach to the ramp, it is proposed lower the tombstone by approximately 25cm, removing the brick plinth so that it sits flush with the ground. The location of the tombstone is not historic and only a small, and blank, corner of the tombstone will be subject to

more wear from passing pedestrian traffic.

Subject to conditions relating to the materials, railings and finish of the ramp and surrounding paving, the Conservation team have no objections to the proposal, which they consider to be well designed and to have minimal impact in the historic environment.

6.3 Accessibility Implications

The church is only currently accessible to people in wheelchairs via a temporary, steep, wooden ramp which has been laid onto the existing two steps up to the front porch of the church. There is an immediate benefit associated with improving this current situation.

In terms of building regulations, the gradient of the ramp should be 1:15 with a clear width of 1500mm rather than the 1:12 and 1200mm that is proposed. However, there is limited space within the bounded churchyard which makes it difficult to achieve manoeuvring space around the ramp. The Building Control inspector has advised that the gradient is not too excessive to be unmanageable. The overall length of the ramp is relatively short such that the general design of the ramp is acceptable.

Access to the church yard is gained via two openings through the medieval boundary wall surrounding the churchyard – one from the western side of the market place and the other from the east. Whilst there is a public thoroughfare of approximately 4m wide which passes between the rear of the Town Hall and the boundary wall, there are frequently barriers down at either end which prevent easy access by wheelchair users or people with prams. It is therefore important to ensure that both accesses into the courtyard remain fully functional for all users. The location of the tombstone would, however, encroach into the space and restrict manoeuvrability around the base of the ramp, thereby forcing wheelchair users to access the churchyard from the east. If the barriers at either end of the Town Hall thoroughfare are down, wheelchair users or those with prams who approach the Church from the west would need to travel all the way around the outside of the Town Hall to enter from the east. Consequently, the applicants propose to lower the tombstone to remove this further obstacle to access.

6.4 Impact on Archaeology

The County Archaeological service has advised that the proposal lies within an area of archaeological potential located within the grounds of the C12th – C13th

Church of St Mary Le More.

The Church is located immediately to the south of the C17th Town Hall and lies between St Mary's Street, thought to be part of the original rectilinear street pattern of the 9th century Saxon Burh, and St Martin's Street, thought to have been a re-alignment created when the position of the main north-south route was altered by the building of the castle soon after the Norman Conquest. This area also formed the core of the later medieval settlement.

Although the application involves only a limited amount of ground disturbance, there is the potential that burials could be disturbed during any foundation construction for the ramp. As such, a condition has been requested which requires an archaeological watching brief to ensure monitoring and recording during the period of construction.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 It is recommended that planning permission be granted because the proposal complies with the relevant Development Plan policies. Subject to the attached conditions, the proposed development would improve accessibility and would be acceptable in terms of its impact on the setting of the adjacent listed buildings, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and on any archaeology in the area.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 That Planning Permission be approved subject to:

1. Commencement three years.

2. Sample of stone for ramp.

3. That details of the mortar mix and widths of joints to be used for the access ramp and details of the treatment of the sides of the ramp shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority before any development commences.

4. That details of the hand rails shall be submitted at a scale of 1:5 (section and elevation) and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development.

5. That any new paving shall be York stone paving to match the existing unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

6. Archaeological watching brief.

7. Restrictions on any disturbance of human remains.

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