

The Church of St Thomas

Church Road
Noak Hill
Havering
Romford
RM4 1LD

Design & Access Statement & Statement of Significance In Connection With an Application for Planning Permission for the Addition of A New Ramp To The Principal Entrance of the Church at the South Porch.

Prepared for The Parochial Church Council of St Thomas Noak Hill.



by

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This report is to be read in conjunction with the submitted set of drawings and the quinquennial report.

- 1 Ecclesiastical Exemption From Listed Building Consent
St Thomas Church is listed Grade 2. The listing description is given on page 6 of the submitted quinquennial inspection report. However, as it is a Church of England ecclesiastical building, it is exempt under the Faculty Jurisdiction from Listed Building Consent. This statement therefore relates to a planning application only. A faculty will be applied for from Chelmsford Diocese should planning permission be granted.

There is also a modern church hall at the rear of the site. That is not listed and this application does not affect that building. However the parking spaces adjacent to that building are included in the overall provision set out in the application, as they belong to the church as a whole and are used by the congregation for church services.

2 Introduction

This report sets out general information pertaining to the proposed development, the site, the existing building and its setting. It includes, a statement of significance of the Church which is a designated heritage asset. In accordance with National Planning Policy Guidance a design and access statement may be combined with the statement of significance to avoid unnecessary duplication.

The planning policy relevant to the proposal is as follows"

Havering Local Plan 2016 – 2031 Adopted November 2021

Policy 24 Parking Provision & Design

Policy 28 Heritage Assets.

Policy 30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

3 Site Access & Proposed Alterations

Most people arrive at the site by car. There is a gated car access off Church Road in the southwest corner of the churchyard. The gate is open weekdays during working hours when the church hall operates as a childcare centre. It is opened at other times when the church is in use. A vehicular entrance road runs parallel to the northwest boundary past the church to the church hall to the north of the site. Parking is located along the southeast edge of this road in two sections, one adjacent to the church and the other adjacent to the church hall. Approximately 20m from the gate a path of loose laid paving slabs runs from the parking area to the west side of the church and around to the south porch. It continues around the south façade past the nave and chancel and the east façade to connect to the hall and the parking area closeby.

A pair of gates at the southern extremity of the churchyard are normally kept locked. However they are still operable and a path of broken paving slabs and cobbles leads from them to the south porch. The path construction is rudimentary.

Entry into the church is principally via the south porch, although there is an external door to the vestry. There are two steps up to each. There are further steps from the vestry to the chancel and down into the nave. It is not readily adaptable for wheelchair access. Moreover access for wheelchair users via the vestry would set them apart from other members of the church who enter via the south porch.

A temporary folding steel ramp is currently used for wheelchair access via the south porch. This however is far from ideal. To use it a wheelchair user must have the assistance of ambulant members of the congregation. Moreover it is very steep, which poses a safety risk to both user and assistant and requires a great deal of strength on the part of that assistant.

This proposal seeks to replace the temporary ramp by a permanent ramp to the south porch and improve the paved access to the parking area. Stepped access and handrails will also be improved. Pushpad entry should enable wheelchair users to enter the church

without the assistance of others but by the same entrance that those people use.

The interior is level or ramped except, the chancel, sanctuary, and platform at the southwest end. As the Eucharist is taken at the edge of the chancel step, this does not preclude anyone wheelchair-bound receiving it with those who are ambulant.

4 Parking Facilities

There are 15 parking spaces within the church site, although they are not marked. The proposal would designate 2 spaces for disabled use. This would reduce the normal car parking spaces to 11 as shown on the proposed site layout. Additional paving by these spaces and a new section of path connect to the existing path to the east of the church and thence lead to the ramp south of the nave. The kerb will be dropped adjacent to the cars to facilitate the movement of wheelchairs from the cars to the path.

The net loss of 2 parking spaces is not significant for such a small church with a small congregation. The benefit of 2 designated parking spaces outweighs their loss.

5 Urban Greening Trees & Tree Preservation Orders

The site is verdant with large areas of grass and hedgerow and many mature trees. The Aurora map on the Havering planning website does not show any tree preservation orders within the grounds of the church. However those that exist are an important part of the character of the setting of the church and of the amenity of the site. No trees will be felled on account of the proposal and none will need to be pruned.

The urban greening factor will remain largely unchanged as the proposed ramp and steps cover a very small fraction of the site and replace existing paving. Moreover the ramp and landing will be made of porous resin-bonded gravel which will be permeable.

The proposed development will have no impact on local wildlife.

The materials used (stone, brick, wrought iron and resin-bonded gravel) are sustainable and free from environmental contaminants.

6 Flood Risk

The site has a very low surface water flood risk. There is no risk of fluvial, sea or reservoir flooding affecting the site. Nevertheless the proposal introduces very little hard surface run off. New paving slabs will be laid loose with gaps in between. The ramp and landing surface will be water permeable. Only the steps and kerb will be impermeable. There area is very small. So there will be very little additional surface water run off. Given the area of the churchyard, all surface water arising from the proposal will soak into the ground within the site.

7 History and Significance

7.1 Introduction

This assessment is prepared in accordance with paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that in applications

“Local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected including any contribution made by their setting”

The definitions used are those contained within the glossary of the Practical Guidance of the National Planning Policy Framework.

7.2 History and Description of the Church Building, Contents, Churchyard and Setting

7.2.1 The Building

St Thomas' Church is listed Grade 2. It is set in a verdant churchyard, on Church Road Noak

Hill, a rural parish in the London Borough of Havering near to Romford and only a few hundred metres from the M25. The Victorian gothic church is of red brick, probably local, with limestone dressings, probably Bath, and slated roofs. It is conventionally oriented approximately east/west with a nave, chancel small north and south transepts, a gallery at the west end and a south porch adjacent to an octagonal tower with a brick spire in the south-west corner. It has a vestry to the northeast. The interior is plainly painted off white. Only the trusses are exposed in the roof and 4 slender timber columns mark the crossing.

Sir Thomas Neave Bt., then governor of the Bank of England, ordered its construction in 1841. It was completed the following year. His family had been landowners in the area since 1788. At the time church the church was built, they owned the local manor, Dagnam Park. According to Aileen Tyler,

'The Neave family staff attended St Edward's Church in Romford every Sunday morning, and walked to the neighbouring St Peter's South Weald Church each Sunday evening. Lady Frances Neave felt this situation to be unsatisfactory, both to herself and to her household.'

St Thomas was therefore built as a chapel of ease at a cost of £1,883. The church was designed by George Smith (1783-1869), a notable architect who had been articled to James Wyatt. He was District Surveyor to the South Division of the City of London and Surveyor to the Southeast Rail Company. His other works include St Paul's School in London, Greenwich and Blackheath Railway Stations, St Albans Town Hall and the Church of St Peter, London Colney. His most notable church however is St Michael and All Angels in Blackheath.

The church largely remains as it was built and most of the interior fittings date from its construction. A new access road was constructed on the north side in 1988 when a new church hall was built on the northeast corner of the church grounds.

The tower was repaired in 1971. Further repairs were undertaken in 2021.

7.2.2 Building Contents

Bell

There is a single bell at the base of the tower that dates from the construction of the building. It is not currently rung, as the condition of the headstock and bearings is not known.

Reredos

The metal reredos, comprising seven arched panels painted gold, records the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the 10 Commandments. It is also original to the church.

Monuments

On the north wall between the first and second windows (numbered from the west) is a limestone cartouche; a memorial to the local fallen of the First World War, shield-shaped and ornamented with rococo scrolls and acanthus leaves. It was erected by parishioners in 1919 and includes the name of Major Arundell Neave who was killed at the first battle of Ypres aged 40 having previously served in India.

On the south wall of the chancel hangs a Neave family Hatchment.

Font

The original stone font located at the west end of the nave under the balcony has been painted. According to Aileen Tyler the copper-coloured cover of beaten metal was made by a metalwork master at St. Edward's School, and was presented in memory of Jack Smith, a Churchwarden from 1967-72.

Pews

These are yellow pine and original to the church. Aileen Tyler states that the pew ends might have originally had fleur de lys head. If so they have now been removed. The pew tops are cut straight.

There is a yellow pine lectern too.

Windows

All the windows, even the lancets have 4-centred arches and brick hood moulds. They contain some important historic stained glass which plays a major role in establishing the significance of the building. That is discussed in section 2 below.

Floor

The floor is timberboarded and carpeted.

Organ

The organ located in the balcony is a small 3-manual and pedal chamber organ, with 645 pipes, and may date from the 18th century. No pipe is longer than six feet. It was placed in St. Thomas' at the beginning of the 20th century and is now electrically blown. The quinquennial report of 2011 states that it came from Dagenham Park.

7.2.3 Churchyard

The churchyard is flat and mainly grassed. It is divided in two by trees east of the sanctuary. Hedgerows containing mature trees and large shrubs bound the south side and Church Road to the west. Beyond an access road and carpark another hedge marks the north boundary.

The many tombstones vary in age, design, material and size. A War Grave Commission headstone commemorates a First World War soldier, Gunner A W Ellingworth. Another headstone marks the grave of Sir Thomas Neave who died on the 12th May 1940. His wife Dorina Lockhart Neave was buried in the same grave fifteen years later. Most of the graves lie to the south of the church and in the extension of the churchyard to the east.

In the northeast corner of the churchyard is the Marriott Hall, a modern church hall with meeting rooms dating from 1988. Mary Marriott was a churchwarden from 1939-1949, and left a bequest to maintain the fabric of the church buildings.

7.2.4 The Setting

Noak Hill sits high on undulating farmland in the extreme northeast corner of Greater London, 17 miles from Charing Cross, close to Harold Hill and Romford and very close to the M25. Until the 1920s the inhabitants were agricultural workers and Neave family servants but most residents now commute.

Noak Hill's name was first recorded in 1490. 'Noak' signified '(the place at) the oak tree'. When the common land at Noak Hill was enclosed in 1814 an area of Roman tiles '300 paces long' was discovered. Shortly after that time, the Neave family, who also acquired most of what is now Harold Hill, bought the former common land. Richard Neave made his fortune from trade with the West Indies in the 18th century. His descendant, Sir Thomas, acquired the late 17th century Bear Inn, at the edge of Harold Hill.

The area retains a few weatherboarded and thatched cottages, several of which are listed grade II, including Rose Cottages, Holly Tree Cottage, Old Keeper's Cottage and Thatched Cottage. The old school house built 6 years after the church, recently served as a restaurant, briefly reverted to educational use and is now a Radha Krishna Temple. To the south-east lies Dagnam Park, the former manor of the Neave family. The house was demolished circa 1952 and part of the estate now provides housing. The remainder is a public nature conservation area.

St Thomas' Church, Noak Hill now the second church in a benefice with St George, Harold Hill was part of the ecclesiastical Parish of St. Edward's Romford until 1978. Romford was originally a chapelry (a district served by an Anglican chapel) of the ancient parish of Hornchurch, containing five wards: town, Harold Wood, Collier Row, Noak Hill, and Havering. It remained subject to Hornchurch for church purposes until the 19th century.

The town grew during the Middle Ages along the main road to London. Its market became one of the largest in Essex and metalworking, weaving, dying and charcoal burning took place. A tile-kiln, attached to Wolves and Joys farm, Noak Hill, was mentioned in 1558. Later brick kilns were recorded in the area.

Around 1618 the urban area was confined to the market place, High Street, the east end of London Road, and the south end of Woolford (now North) Street. Hamlets fringed the commons at Collier Row and Noak Hill, and on the main road at Hare Street (now Gidea Park). The civil parish changed little in the next 200 years. The population has been roughly estimated as 1,345 in 1580, 1,485 in 1680, and 1,846 in 1735. In 1670 there were 323 houses in Romford, of which 184 were in the town ward, 56 in Collier Row, 50 in Harold Wood ward (the present Gidea Park and Harold Hill), and 33 in Noak Hill.

In the 18th century Romford became a busy coaching town and the arrival of the railway stimulated the growth of industry, notably the first Ind, Coope brewery. Romford has become a shopping centre and populous suburban area, with new light industries on its outskirts. Agriculture remained the principal occupation of the rural ward of Noak Hill up to 20th century.

For civil purposes Romford was independent of Hornchurch by the 16th century. A local board, later urban district council, was formed for Romford in 1851. By 1895 Noak Hill had been removed from Romford (Rural) as a separate civil parish. In 1900 the civil parish of Romford (Rural) was united with that of Romford (Urban) and included in Romford Urban District. In 1934 the civil parishes of Havering and Noak Hill were added to the urban district, and the number of wards was increased to 7.

7.3 The Significance of the Church

As a listed building the historic significance of St Thomas is nationally acknowledged. The building is visually striking in its setting and has played a significant role in the social history of the area. The churchyard has also been burial site of the parishioners for more than 100 years and remains open.

7.3.1 Special architectural and historical Interest

While externally there is little ornamentation the architectural form is quite complex for a small chapel of ease having shallow transepts to the north and south and an octagonal tower and spire on the southwest corner. Although overall it appears gothic the 4-centred window heads more common in Tudor architecture lend it a Victorian eclecticism. Rarely for a church in such a populous setting most of the original building remains intact unaltered including the interior fittings.

St Thomas Noak Hill is later and smaller than the more notable churches of its architect, George Smith. St Peter, London Colney, a sizeable barn of a building with Romanesque windows was built in 1825 and his more celebrated and larger gothic revival church, St Michaels and all Angels, was built on the Captor Estate in Blackheath in 1828-30. Stylistically all three churches are quite distinct.

The special interest of the building in connection with the Nave family and there estate has been discussed above.

7.3.2 Any Significant Features of Artistic or Archaeological Interest

The notable and much older fittings brought into the church by that family contribute to the value of the building as much, if not more so than the historic fabric of the building itself. They include painted window glass of the 16th-18th centuries, given by Sir Thomas Nave, Bt. Among these pieces are medallions with the badge of Jane Seymour, the arms of Charles II and Queen Anne, and some French and Flemish glass. On page 127 of An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Essex, Volume 2, Central and South west (London, 1921) these valuable fittings are described thus:

'Glass: In E. window under Renaissance canopy large Crucifixion with the two

thieves, four angels, St. Mary Magdalene, the Virgin, St. John, Mary, the mother of James, and Mary Salome, two figures on horseback, and two soldiers holding the sponge and spear respectively; in lower part of window, the Virgin, man and woman, probably St. Elizabeth and Zacharias, St. John the Baptist and St. Peter, early 17th-century; upper part said to have come from Notre Dame du Lac, Tirlemont, Belgium; lower part from Rouen. In easternmost window on N.—five medallions, (a) badge of Jane Seymour (Plate p. xxxvii.), in a wreath with initials H. A. wrongly placed; (b) crowned shield of France, modern, quartering England in a wreath with initials H.A.; (c) fleur-de-lis in wreath, all early 16th-century; (d) shield of the arms of the duchy of Lorraine in a wreath; (e) shield of the arms of the duchy of Barre in a wreath, 16th-century; also a picture-panel of Doeg before Saul with inscription below, 17th-century. In second window on N.—quartered shield of Manners, Earl of Rutland, with Garter, 17th-century. In third window, achievement of Neave arms, 17th-century, with modern additions. In easternmost window on S. side—three medallions of French heraldry, 16th-century; below, three picture panels of (a) the Incredulity of St. Thomas; (b) the Scourging; (c) the Agony in the Garden; (a and b) 17th-century, (c) later. In second window—in a cartouche, arms of Charles II. In third window—quartered shield of arms, late 17th-century. In W. window—panel with Garter and Arms of Queen Anne.'

'On the north wall the first window depicts a scene from the 22nd chapter of the First Book of Samuel. Opposite, on the south wall, the glass shows New Testament scenes: St Thomas at the resurrection of Christ, Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and His mistreatment by the Roman Soldiers. The second window on the North wall depicts a quartered shield of Manners, Earl of Rutland in the 17th century, and back on the South wall can be seen the arms of Charles II. At the East end of the North wall you can read the inscription 'Honi Soit Qui Mai Y Pense'.'

'Standing before the altar, you can now see the three beautiful east end windows of Flemish glass. The upper centre light depicts the scene of the Crucifixion, and the upper two lights show the thieves who were crucified with Christ. The lower panels are of a later date. The glass in the two outer lights date (sic) back to about 1590 and comes from Rouen. On the left you can see St. John the Baptist; on the right is St. Peter holding the key to the Kingdom of Heaven. The middle lower panel dates back to the 17th century and comes from Brussels. Here you can see the Virgin Mary, her cousin Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist) and Zecharias (husband of Elizabeth).'

'Look to your right, on the south wall, to see the hatchment which was actually placed right over a window. This hatchment came from above the fireplace at Dagnam Park Hall, the home of the Neave family, and commemorates the death of Sir Arundell Neave in 1877. This Neave family coat-of-arms bears the words 'Sola Proba Quae Honesta'. Beneath the hatchment you can see a memorial to Lady Frances Neave who, as already mentioned gave instructions for the building of St. Thomas' in 1841.'

'Miscellanea: In chancel—on N. wall, carved wooden panel of the Crucifixion with predella of the bearing of the cross, foreign work, probably 17th-century.'

7.4 Impact of the Proposals on the Significance

As the proposal involves an external ramp, it will not affect the interior or fittings and will have no impact on their significance.

The only fabric that will be lost or concealed is the lower step leading to the south porch and the base of the wall adjacent to it. The ramp construction will abut but not be built into the porch fabric. It therefore could be removed without harm to the church.

The area of path that will be excavated to make way for the proposal comprises is made of modern materials of no great historic significance such as precast paving slabs and path edging.

The ramp steps and handrails will be visible in the churchyard from the south and will alter the south façade of the building. However we contend that the alteration would not be detrimental. A perfunctory tubular steel handrail will be removed to enable the ramp to be built. The area of crude uneven paving outside the church will be replaced by a resin-bonded gravel landing ramp and stone steps. The new hand wrought forged handrails will be in keeping with the Victorian architecture of the church. The bricks of the kerb and the stonework of the copings and steps will match the brickwork and stone dressings of the church respectively. The ramp has been designed to weather gracefully in harmony with the historic structure.

In the summary loss of historic fabric will be minimal and the effect of the proposal on the appearance of the building and its setting will be benign. In our view it will give rise to no harm to the significance of the heritage asset but rather conserve that significance. However even if the proposal were deemed to cause harm, that harm would be slight (very insubstantial) and would be outweighed by the public benefit of providing permanent ramped access into the building, which not only supports the aims of the Disability Discrimination Acts but also by making the building accessible to more people will help sustain it.

8.0 Conclusion

From the above considerations, it can be seen that the proposal complies with design policy and should therefore be granted consent.

References

English Heritage Listed Building 4 1994

B Cherry, C O'Brien, N Pevsner, *Buildings of England: London 5: East* Yale 2005.

RCHME, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Essex, Volume 2, Central and South west* (London, 1921), p. 197.

Victoria County History: A History of the County of Essex: Volume 7, London 1978, pp. 56-64 & 82-91

A leaflet produced by the church circa 1992 about the history of the church written by Aileen Tyler