

WEST STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, WEST STREET EAST GRINSTEAD

HERITAGE STATEMENT

September 2025

1 INTRODUCTION

West Street Church is a Grade II listed chapel located at the eastern end of West Street, East Grinstead. The congregation, which remains active and growing, seeks to enhance its facilities and, importantly, improve the external setting of the three adjoining structures: the church itself, the entrance building, and the adjacent small hall.

A full planning and listed building application was submitted in 2017 and approved under reference DM/16/5338, a subsequent reapplication was made in 2022 and approved under reference DM/22/0738. The current application is submitted on advice from Mid Sussex Planning department in September 2025.

2 SITE AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Nonconformist movement in East Grinstead grew significantly during the 19th century. The construction of the Zion Chapel in 1810 reflects this expansion and coincided with the westward extension of the town. West Street Church was the first of five Baptist and Nonconformist chapels built over an 80-year period and is now the only surviving example; the others were demolished between the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Originally, the chapel formed part of a group that included a minister's house (the Manse), which once stood on the site now occupied by Chapter House. Two years after the chapel's construction, a Sunday school was added, and internal galleries were installed to accommodate an additional 200 worshippers.

In 1813, a new Manse was built adjacent to the chapel. Further alterations followed: in 1862, a classroom and vestry (the current side hall) were added, and in 1880, the main hall was extended eastwards, and a new entrance building was constructed at the front. These changes reflected the needs of a growing congregation. A small burial ground once lay in front of the chapel, separated from West Street by railings, but this was lost during later road widening.

The present congregation took over in 1981, undertaking substantial structural repairs and internal alterations to meet their needs. These included creating new stair access to the first-floor gallery, which was subdivided into two self-contained spaces overlooking the main hall, and adding a new kitchen to the small hall.

Before 1980, the previous congregation worshipped in Chantry House, a modern building from the 1960s–70s that replaced the demolished Manse. At that time, the chapel stood empty and in a poor state of repair.

3 THE HISTORIC ENGLAND LISTING (GRADE 2) DETAILS:

ZION CHAPEL

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: ZION CHAPEL

List entry Number: 1249041

Location

ZION CHAPEL, WEST STREET

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: West Sussex

District: Mid Sussex

District Type: District Authority

Parish: East Grinstead

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 28-Jan-1948

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 430884

Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List entry Description

Summary of Building Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

1. 1068 WEST STREET

Zion Chapel TQ 3937 1/49 28.1.48.

II

2. Red brick. Semi-circular headed windows in semi-circular headed double recesses. "Gothic" glazing bars, brick pediment. Building altered by ground floor extensions to front and side. Railings, but mutilated.

Listing NGR: TQ3943537993

Selected Sources

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details

National Grid Reference: TQ 39436 37989

4 HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

4.1 Summary of Proposals

The proposals include the following key elements:

4.1.1 Replacement of the Existing Entrance Structure

The current single-storey foyer, added around the 1880s, is architecturally unsympathetic and poorly constructed. It projects across the principal elevation, disrupting the original proportions of this important façade, and uses non-matching brickwork with oversized bricks. The structure is uninsulated and of poor build quality. The proposal seeks to remove this addition and replace it with a more appropriate design.

4.1.2 Creation of a Transparent and Welcoming Entrance

A new entrance of high architectural quality will provide a more open and inviting approach. Its transparency will visually connect the building with the paved forecourt and the public realm beyond, while revealing the original proportions of the listed façade and reinstating the visibility of the historic door openings.

4.1.3 Improved Integration of the Three Buildings

The new entrance will create a more harmonious link between the church and the side hall, both internally and externally. The roof of the new entrance will extend to the small hall's front elevation, providing sheltered external space. Corten steel-style cladding (Kingspan Oxidised 0010) will be used for the porch roof fascia and vertical panels. The same material will also clad the gabled front elevation of the small hall, visually uniting the additions with the original chapel.

4.1.4 Enhancement of the Small Hall

The proposals will improve the small hall by introducing more natural light and restoring views of the church's side elevation, which is currently obscured. Thermal insulation will be upgraded to make the hall more energy-efficient and functional. The works will also resolve long-standing weathering issues caused by the proximity of the hall's roof guttering to the original tripartite side windows of the main hall.

4.1.5 *Rationalisation of Gallery Access*

The gallery, while not original, dates from an early phase of the chapel's development and reflects its historic evolution. The current stair arrangement, introduced in the early 1980s, is visually intrusive, requiring a prominent bulkhead that disrupts the otherwise level soffit beneath the gallery. The revised design introduces a single-flight stair running parallel to the gallery width and concealed behind the rear partition, eliminating the bulkhead and restoring a cleaner ceiling line. The gallery floor will return to a single level, removing the need for intermediate landings.

4.1.6 *Alteration to the Small Hall Roof Profile*

The north-facing roof slope of the small hall currently drains towards the chapel's side wall, causing significant weathering and damage to the original fabric, including the base of the large south-facing window. The proposal retains the visible south slope but replaces the concealed north slope with vertical clerestory glazing, set back from the chapel wall. This adjustment increases visibility of the chapel's side elevation and its large Gothic window, both from within the small hall and from external viewpoints. It also resolves drainage issues and removes the poorly detailed gutter that currently abuts the chapel wall.

4.1.7 *Contribution to Future Public Realm Improvements*

The East Grinstead Town Masterplan (2006) identifies West Street as a "major pedestrian route" and an area for "enhanced public realm," including a proposed new town square within sight of West Street Church. The new entrance structure is designed to complement this vision. This arrangement overlooks the piazza and the location of the proposed town square. While the Masterplan has yet to be fully implemented, these proposals represent a significant step toward achieving its objectives, creating an attractive edge to a future piazza and enhancing the prominence of this important listed building.

5 ASSESSMENT OF LISTED BUILDING POLICY

5.1 Externally:

The removal of the unsympathetic porch extension and its replacement with a predominantly glazed entrance will not harm the historic grouping of the chapel and side hall. Although set back from the road, the chapel's front elevation remains the most prominent building along this section of West Street. The proposed glazed addition will ensure the new structure does not dominate the street scene. Importantly, the lower part of the original front elevation, including the paired door openings, will once again be visible from the street for the first time since the 1880s. This is a significant heritage benefit, enhancing both the building and the wider conservation area.

5.2 Internally:

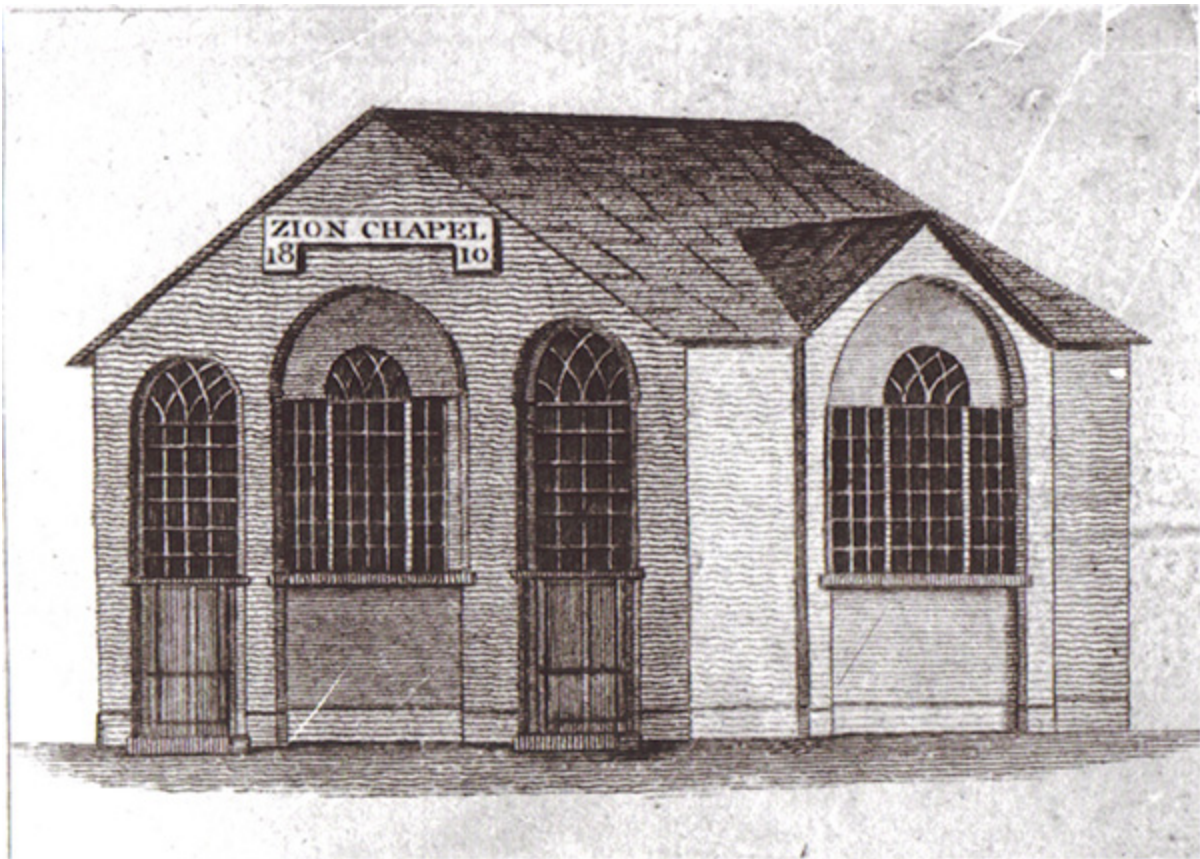
The chapel interior has been substantially altered over time, but the four original tripartite Gothic windows remain in situ and continue to light the space effectively. Both side walls have been boxed out with later decorative panels, and the north wall conceals an inserted steel support frame. The proposed works will not adversely affect these surviving historic elements.

6 OVERALL HERITAGE IMPACT

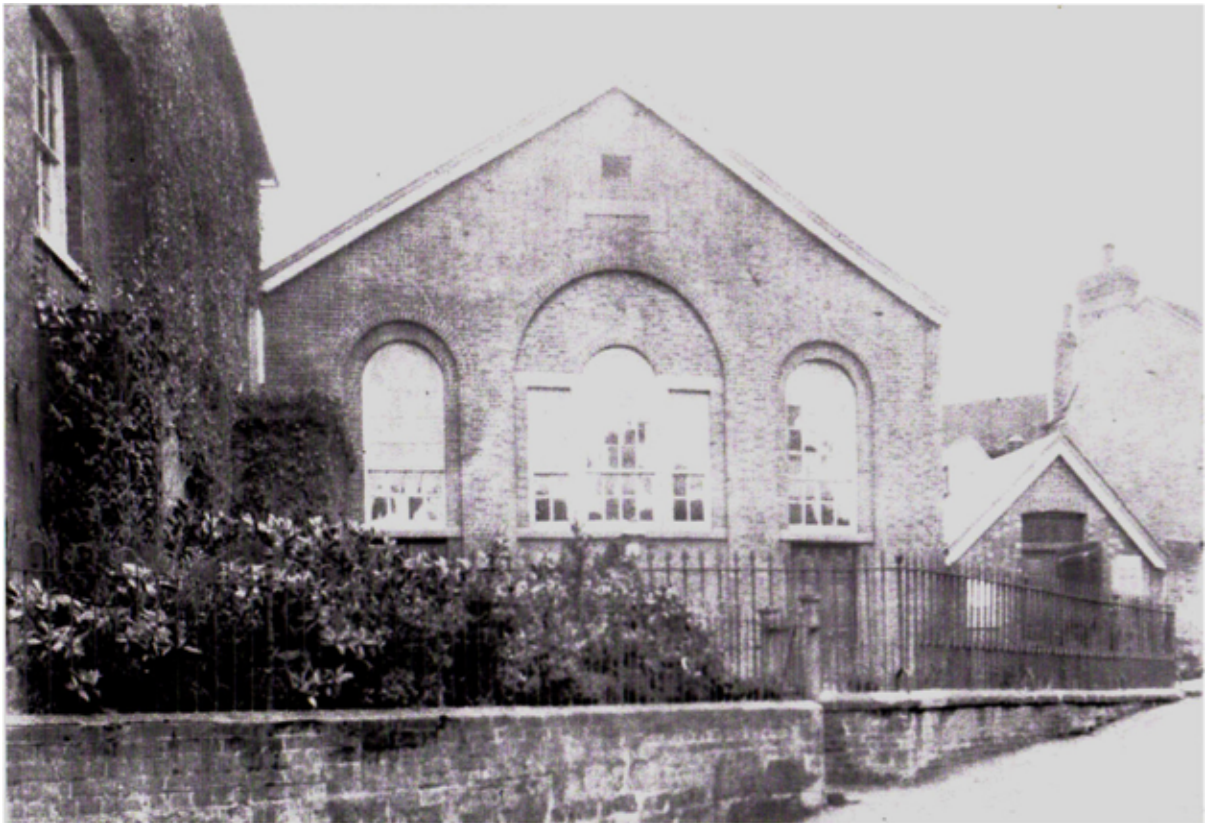
The proposals will preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the listed chapel and its setting, while addressing long-standing functional and maintenance issues. The grouping of the three structures has been reconsidered to emphasise the primacy of the 1810 chapel, with the side hall retaining its subordinate role. The use of Corten steel-style cladding (Kingspan Oxidised 0010) for the entrance and small hall complements the mellow red brick of the original building, visually uniting the later additions and reinforcing the architectural hierarchy.

7 FIGURES

7.1 Original sketch of building before construction



7.2 Early street view photograph before addition of porch



7.3 Street view before construction of Chapter House



7.4 Street view (~2010)



7.5 Internal views thought to be from late 19th Century/early 20th Century

