

**From:** Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 02 June 2025 15:49:05 UTC+01:00  
**To:** "Hamish Evans" <Hamish.Evans@midsussex.gov.uk>  
**Subject:** DM/25/0958 Former Methodist Church Hall, Cuckfield Rd, HPP

Hi Hamish

Comments on the above application for permission in principle.

The proposed development site is the former Methodist Church Hall located to the eastern side of Cuckfield Road within the Hurstpierpoint Conservation Area. The current proposal is for the development of up to 6 dwellings on the site across a floorspace of up to 1000 square metres.

Due in part to the relative isolation of the area prior to the development of improved road, and later rail, transport during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Sussex has a long tradition of non-conformist religion, which is witnessed by the survival of chapel buildings belonging to various denominations in many local settlements, including several within Hurstpierpoint. The significance of these buildings within the village, both in terms of its history and street scene, is noted within the adopted Conservation Area Character Appraisal at p. 11 '*Nonconformist Hurstpierpoint*'.

[Hurstpierpoint Conservation Area Appraisal](#)

The Chapel in question was only quite recently included within the Conservation Area, when the boundary was reviewed and several extensions made in 2018. The adopted appraisal justifies the relevant extension northwards along Cuckfield Road as follows:

*'St Christopher's house is dated 1898 and has four spectacular stacks of ornate brick chimneypots as well as decorative hopper heads to the downpipes. This is followed by several attractive Victorian and Edwardian houses with strong architecture, then the Methodist church. The Victorian and Edwardian houses retain many original features such as Palladian window surrounds.*

*The boundary of the Conservation Area on Cuckfield Road at present excludes this historic cluster of buildings including the old bakery and Methodist Chapel, as well as a mix of Victorian and Edwardian properties including St Christopher's which are attractive and characterful, and retain many original features. Most front gardens are planted with hedges and trees which soften the street scene.*

*The long straight road is the main northern approach to Hurstpierpoint, and looking south allows glimpses of the landmark church steeple in the distance. It is a key gateway into the village centre, and is lined by attractive and characterful buildings. A boundary adjustment would help safeguard the special character of this part of the village.'*

Historical map regression suggests that the Chapel dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and retains some of its original features, although it has a later extension to the front. It is a prominent building in the street scene, and is of some character, making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area. It is worth noting that the revised boundary extends specifically to include the church at its northernmost point, which is a recognition of the value of the building in this respect. The building is also a historical focus of

the local community, which is recognised in its previous designation as an asset of communal value. The Chapel closed in 2023.

In this context, there would be in an in principle objection to the loss of the existing building in terms of adverse impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. However, it is noted that the submitted planning statements suggests that the new dwellings would *'likely be provided through the conversion of the existing buildings on the site'*. I also note that this statement suggests that matters of heritage and design will not be considered by the applicant at this stage, but will be reserved for a possible further technical details consent application - I am assuming that as I have been consulted on the current application these matters can in fact to some extent at least be taken into consideration as part of the current proposal.

In my opinion, the proposal raises a number of potential concerns in terms of the impact on the Conservation Area:

- The proposed change of use of the building would result in the loss of a community facility (specifically the church hall) which is clearly valued by local residents, and has been a focus of local activity for worship and other purposes for over 100 years. Notwithstanding the applicant's point that the immediately surrounding area is largely residential in nature, the loss of this facility will have an adverse impact on the vitality of the area, which will detract from its character.
- The applicant appears unwilling to commit themselves as to whether the existing building would be retained as part of the detailed proposals. The loss of the existing building would be damaging to the character and appearance of the street scene and of the Conservation Area, for the reasons set out above.
- Based on the very limited information in front of us regarding the floor plan of the existing building, I find it difficult to envisage how the chapel could be converted to create up to 6 new residential units without adverse impact to its external appearance. The existing spaces within the building, including the large volume of the church hall, and the existing elevational treatment including the sweeping roofs and the disposition of the fenestration (which appears to be almost entirely at ground floor, with the exception of the front facing gable), do not appear conducive to this intensive a use without extensive alterations, including to the exterior. Such extensive alterations are likely to detract from the character and appearance of the building and its contribution to the Conservation Area.

For these reasons it is my opinion that the current proposal, based on the limited detail in front of us, raises significant concerns in terms of the potential impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, both in terms of the change of use in itself, the potential (which is not ruled out by the applicant) for the loss of the existing building, and of the proposed intensity of that use, and likely associated impact on the appearance of the existing building if retained. This will be contrary to the requirements of District Plan Policy DP35 which states that: *'Development in a conservation area will be required to conserve or enhance its special character, appearance and the range of activities which contribute to it.'* In terms of the NPPF it is difficult to assign a level of harm without a fully detailed proposal, but I would expect this to fall within the less than substantial range, such that paragraph 215 will apply.

Thanks,

Emily

Please note that this advice is given at Officer level only and is without prejudice to the formal decision of the District Council.

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