



Former Congregational Church, Ardingly

Initial Statement of Significance



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1.0 Introduction

HNW Architects have been appointed to produce an Initial Statement of Significance to inform the adaptive reuse of the Former Congregational Church, Ardingly to a single residential home.

This report provides a summary of the history of the site based on a site visit and desk-based research, followed by an assessment of the significance of the existing building and surrounding heritage assets, including the contribution made by the application site to significance and setting.

The document concludes with constraints and potential opportunities for the site to inform and support a design approach from a heritage perspective.

2.0 Background

2.1 Location and surrounding area

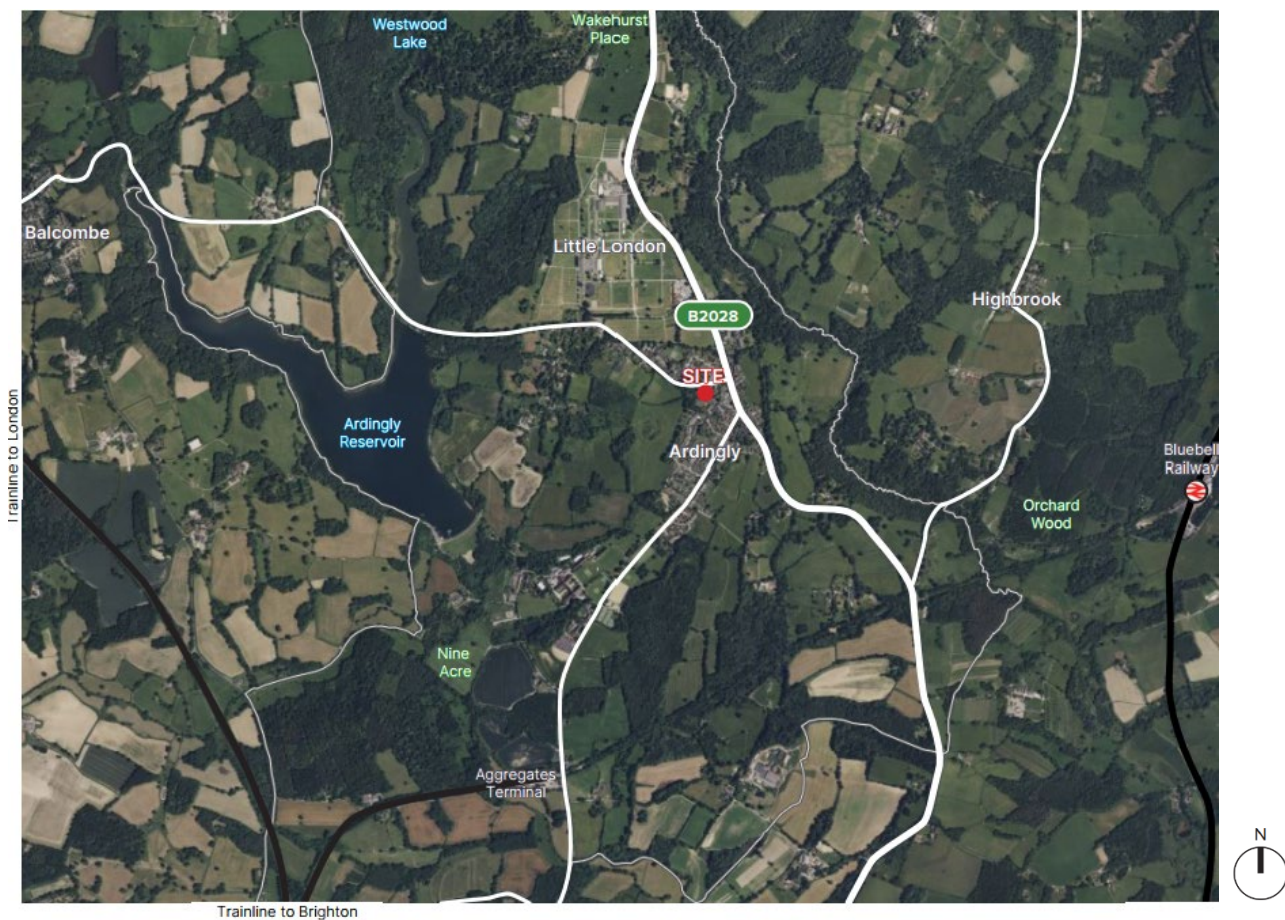


Figure 1: Location of Ardingly within surrounding area

Ardingly is located within the rural village of Ardingly, in West Sussex and falls within the administrative areas of Mid Sussex District Council and Ardingly Parish Council, and is located within Ardingly's Built Up Area Boundary, the High Weald National Landscape and the Ashdown Forest 7 kilometre Zone of Influence.

The original settlement of Ardingly was built on the western end of a ridge to the north of the River Ouse prior to it dropping down into a valley containing Ardingly Brook. To the east of the village was the hamlet of Hapstead Green located on the Lindfield to Newchapel road which in the 18th century was turnpiked as a major London-Brighton route. As a consequence Ardingly began to shift eastwards eventually taking over and assuming the

settlement's name by the 1896-7 OS map, most likely influenced by the construction of Ardingly station and the neighbouring college.

The site is located on Street Lane which connects Ardingly with the village of Balcombe approximately 3 miles to the west.



Figure 2: Aerial view of the site within Ardingly



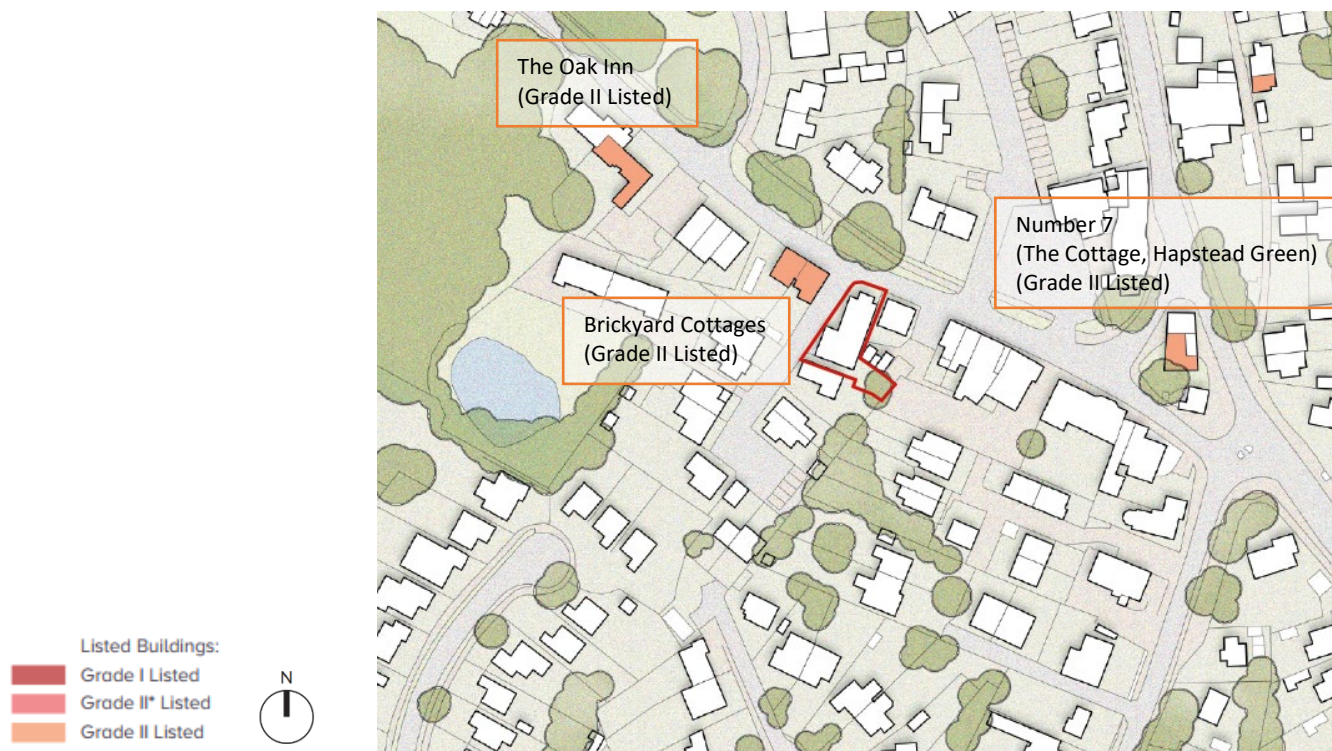


Figure 4: Listed Building site plan

The site is located on the southern side of Street Lane. An established residential area, close to the village centre and sits within Ardingly's Conservation Area and is immediately to the east of the Grade II Listed Brickyard Cottages.

Historic England's official list entries and descriptions of the the three buildings in close proximity to the former congregational church as follows (images April 2024):



Brickyard Cottages, 1 and 2, Street Lane
Heritage Category: Listed Building
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1286530
Date first listed: 11-May-1983

ARDINGLY STREET LANE 1. 5405 Brickyard Cottages (Nos 1 and 2) TQ 3429 33/403 II 2. One building. Probably C17, refaced with red brick on ground floor and tile-hung above. Tiled roof. Casement windows. Red brick chimney breast on east wall. Two storeys. Three windows. Modern addition of one window-bay at west end.

The Oak Inn, Street Lane
Heritage Category: Listed Building
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1354789
Date first listed: 11-May-1983

ARDINGLY STREET LANE 1. 5405 The Oak Inn TQ 3429 33/404 II 2. C17 or earlier. Two storeys. Three windows. Ground floor red brick, above tile-hung. Tiled roof. Casement windows.



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Number 7 (The Cottage, Hapstead Green), High Street
 Heritage Category: Listed Building
 Grade: II
 List Entry Number: 1025797
 Date first listed: 11-May-1983

ARDINGLY HIGH STREET (West Side) 1. 5405 No 7 (The Cottage, Hapstead Green) TQ 3429 33/397 II 2. C18 or earlier. Two storeys. Three windows. West front faced with weather boarding on ground floor and tile-hung above; east front red brick and grey headers alternately. Tiled roof. Casement windows on ground floor, sashes above without glazing bars.

2.2 Brief History of the site

The former congregational church is understood to have been founded in 1822, with the current building dating from 1882 on the site of the older building. The Independent churches were ones in which each congregation was autonomous, upholding the principles of independence. In the 19th century they became known as congregational.

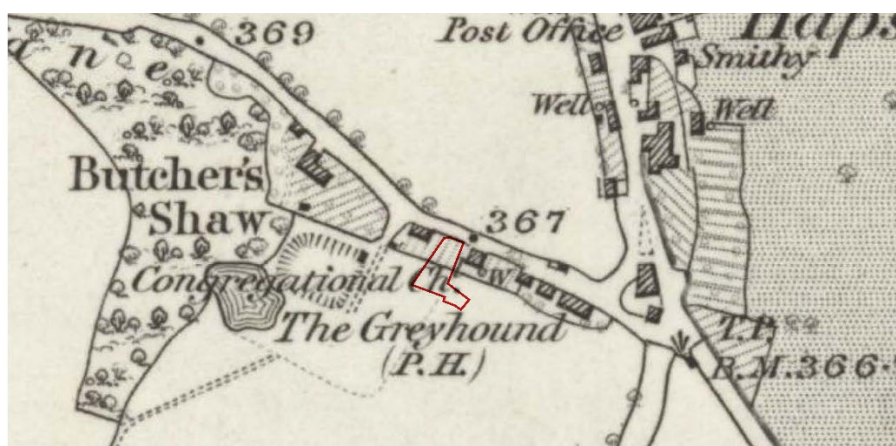


Figure 5: 1874 Map – indicating original church, replaced circa 1882.

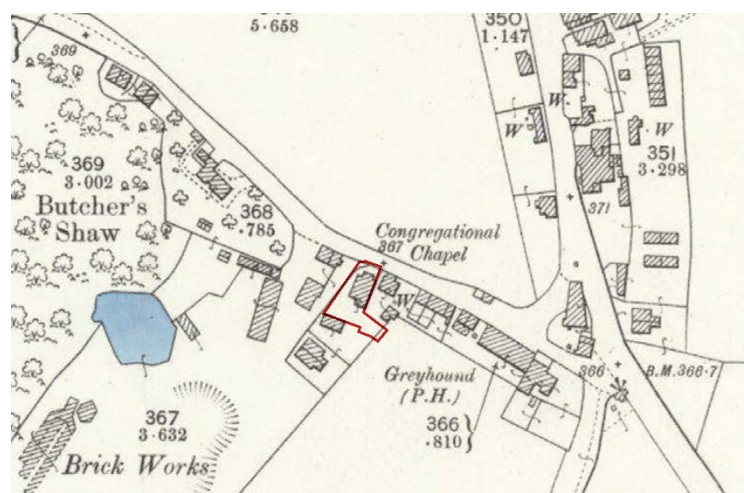


Figure 6: 1896 Map – indicating replacement church.

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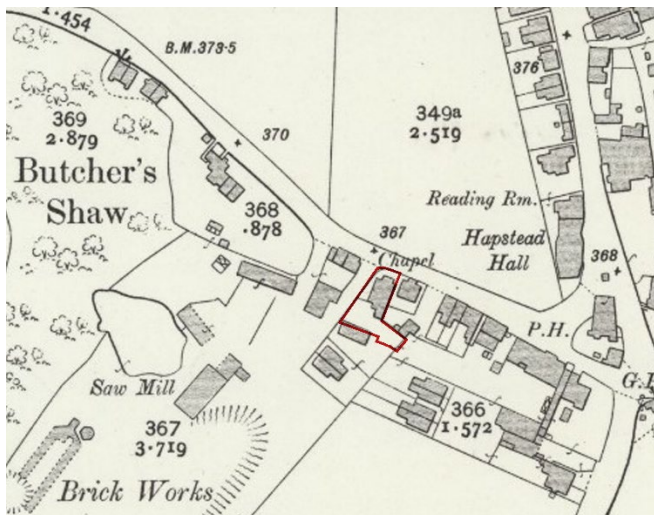


Figure 7: 1909 Map.

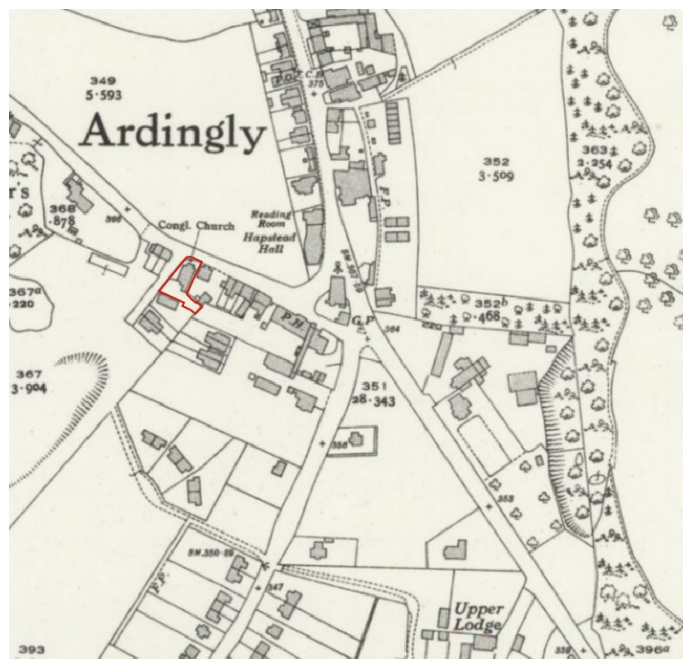


Figure 8: 1937 Map.



Figure 9: 1955 Map.

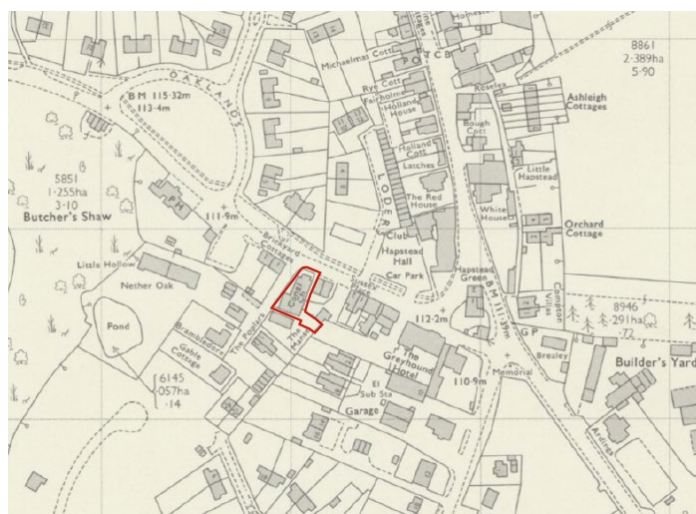


Figure 10: 1971 Map.

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Figure 10: Historical postcard, pre-1954.

Since the church's rebuild circa 1882, the church has been renovated and extended numerous times over the years. Notable extensions being added in 1910s and the larger rear extension in 1954.



Figure 10: Stone laid 1954.

The building continued to operate as a congregational church into the 2000s with diminishing attendance and had formally closed by 2010.



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Figure 11: Congregational Church 2009.

The most significant recent renovations to the main church area were carried out in early 2012, with works including: Insulation added to the walls; floors replaced; and heating added. The existing stained glass windows were also removed, repaired and put back as double glazed units within replacement modern frames.

It is recognised that the congregational chapel became little used. Within the Ardingly Village Plan from 2003, the church was cited as requiring an economic solution as being no longer actively serviced and by 2010 it had formally closed. In 2014 the building changed use, becoming a spiritualist and natural therapy centre.



Figure 12: Former Congregational Church building used as a spiritual and therapy centre 2015.

It is understood that the spiritual and therapy uses have ceased July 2024.

2.3 Description of the building



The existing building comprises of a single storey, brick structure, which was formerly The Ardingly Congregational Church, with a series of single storey later additions to the rear which currently house toilets, storage and community spaces.

There is a shared vehicular access to the northern side of the building that serves the dwellings beyond. There is uncontrolled on street parking on Street Lane and the shared access road. The perimeter of the site is bounded by a low brick wall.

Figure 13: Former Congregational Church 2024.

The main structure, dating from the late 19th century, features an internal vaulted ceiling and a brick-built porch serving as the principal entrance. The original building is a reserved brick built chapel with a gabled tiled roof, retaining external period features such as the original brick and timber

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porch, arched stained glass windows, and a gothic arched doorway. The main body of the former chapel is constructed from multicoloured brickwork, decorative terracotta elements, detailing, and brick buttresses on the side elevation.



Figure 14: Decorative brickwork, terracotta and inside of porch.

While many original features remain externally, the original chapel has undergone significant alterations over time. The roof is not original, the main hall side windows have been replaced with modern sets, retaining the historical stained glass within double-glazed units. Additionally, the head brickwork of some windows and the coping to the boundary wall have been replaced. Some brickwork is in poor condition, particularly the angled brickwork to the side buttresses, where severe weathering and patching are evident.



Figure 15: Replacement modern windows to main hall and window head, erroded side buttresses.

The interior of the main hall is in a well-maintained and in good condition, with the roof structure partly exposed. However, it has been largely altered with modernisation works, including added wall insulation, replaced windows, new flooring, and heating installation.



Figure 16: Interior of the main hall looking north (towards the entrance porch) and south.

There are a series of brick extensions to the rear (south) of the main hall, the largest of which, extending to the lane frontage, was built in 1954. Two of the rear extensions have gabled tiled roofs, with the southern pitch largely covered in solar panels. A flat-roofed extension wraps around the southern and eastern edge of the site. A variety of window types and proportions are present within the rear extensions.



Figure 17: Series of more modern extensions to the south of the hall building.

The interior of the rear extensions is relatively modern, varied and holds little of historical value.



Figure 18: Interior of rear extension buildings.

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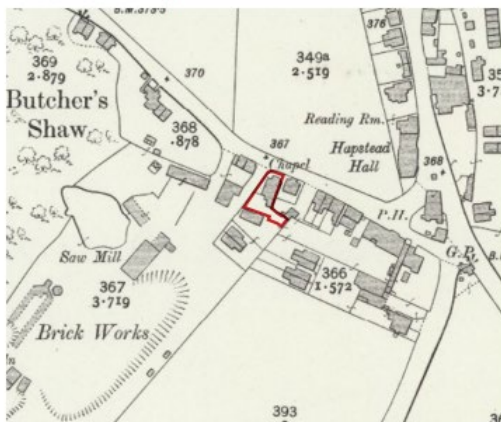
3.0 Architectural Significance of the Building

The building, formerly The Congregational Church, has evolved, adapted and changed over time. It retains several original features from its late 19th century construction, particularly externally, while other areas have been amended incrementally contributing to its limited historical and architectural significance.

1890's Historical Map



1910's Historical Map



1950's Historical Map



Current OS Map



Figure 19: Selection of historical maps with site boundary indicated.

The building has had significant alterations both internally and externally. The Interior of the entrance porch has some retained original features while the main hall has been largely altered and modernised while maintaining its volume and some visible roof structure. The former congregational church has several relatively modern rear extensions that have little historical value.



Figure 20: Plan of buildings historic evolution.

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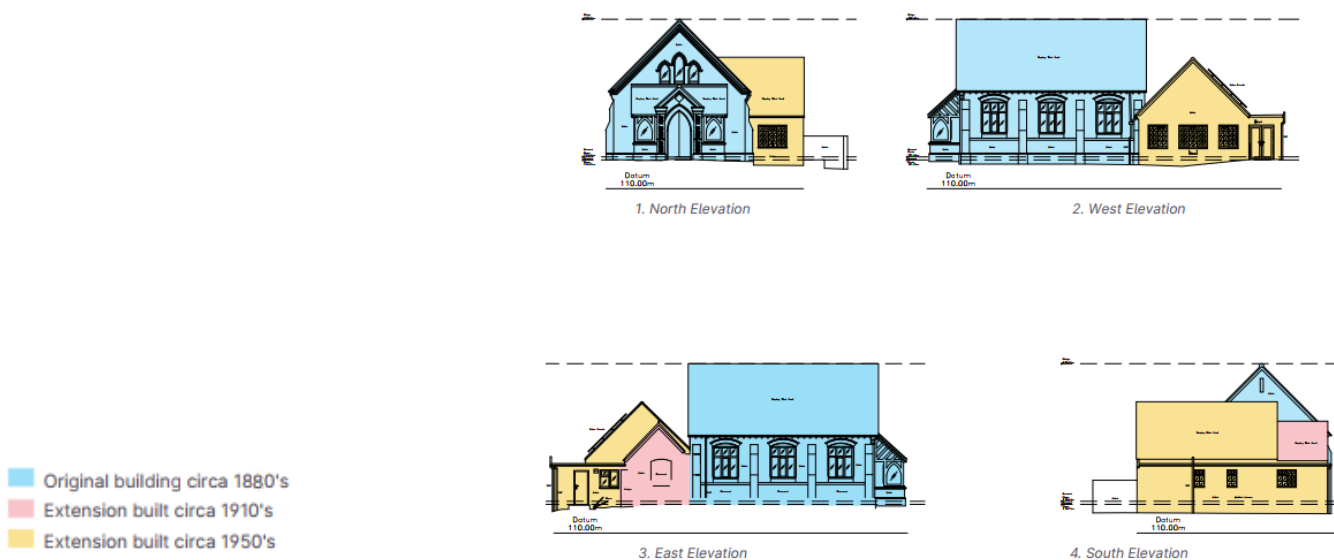


Figure 21: Elevation of buildings historic evolution.

While not a designated heritage asset, nor identified on local heritage lists or within current Local and Neighbourhood Plans, the Conservation Area, or similar documentation, the original building has some architectural and historical merit. It contributes positively to the local street scene and setting within the Conservation Area and has a close relationship with the adjacent Grade II Listed Brickyard Cottages. Its set-back nature behind the perimeter wall gives the Brickyard Cottages some visual relief when viewed from Street Lane.

The building has not functioned as a congregation church or chapel, nor been publicly accessible, for a considerable amount of time. It switching to a private therapy centre in more recent years and currently closed and vacant, having been unable to sustain a commercial use. Despite this, the retained architecture of the original building maintains some connections with the past and the evolution of Ardingly.

In summary, the former Congregational Church is a building of characterful appearance, with its significance lying in its contribution to the surrounding area, its position in the street scene, its proximity to the Grade II listed Brickyard Cottages, and its overall contribution to the Conservation Area.

4.0 Constraints and Opportunities

Conversion of the former Congregational Church to a single residential home offers an opportunity to preserve the building's architectural heritage and secure its long-term future. Reusing the building as a home can draw investment in its repair and restoration, ensuring its sustainability and enhancing the village's character.

Constraints:

- Architectural significance of elevations: The principal elevations of the original 1880s building facing Street Lane and the side access road hold the greatest architectural significance. Any proposed alterations to these elevations require careful consideration.
- Window and door openings: New window or door openings on these key elevations are likely to be contentious. Conversion work should utilise existing openings on these facades.
- Internal subdivision: Subdividing the original volume within the hall could detract from its appreciation and should be avoided. However, a sympathetic mezzanine that complements the existing openings and exposed roof structure could be feasible, preserving the appreciation of the original volume.

- Removal of rear extensions: The removal of the 1950s rear extensions and other rear buildings must be handled carefully to reveal and restore the original external elevations currently concealed by these additions.
- Boundary wall: The boundary wall positively contributes to the street scene and should be altered sensitively.

Opportunities:

- Revitalising a redundant site: Bringing a redundant site back into viable use by converting it into a residential home will revive and protect the former Congregational Church ensuring its positive contribution to the street scene in the long term.
- Compatible residential use: Introducing a compatible residential use into an established residential area, where the building is surrounded by existing homes.
- Maintaining original building: Retaining the existing building and limiting any amendments externally will maintain its existing relationship and prominence within the street scene, its setting adjacent to the listed Brickyard Cottages, and its contribution to the Conservation Area. Maintaining the character and appearance of the original chapel building will maintain its point of interest and connection with the past. Any amendments to the original building should be limited and sympathetic.
- Enhancing historical features: Retaining and enhancing any remaining historical or architectural features, both externally and internally.
- Minimise structural intervention: Seeking a conversion scheme that minimally intervenes with the original structure, reversing later additions to reveal and retain more of the original features, especially in the porch area, to protect the character of these internal spaces.
- Mezzanine level: Consider the introduction of a mezzanine level to the main hall, provided it is sensitive to the existing windows, delicately connected to the walls, aligned with the hall's axial arrangement, and maintains appreciation of the existing volume and exposed roof structure.
- Boundary wall enhancement: Retaining and enhancing the boundary wall gives an opportunity to improve the street scene along Street Lane and the side access road by reducing and simplifying clutter around the wall to enhance the building's appreciation.
- Rear extensions: The existing rear extensions lack particular merit. Their alteration, removal, or replacement should be non-contentious if done sympathetically.
- Rear extension reconfiguration: Improving and reconfiguring the later additions to the rear of the original building to better align window proportions and arrangements with the original structure.

5.0 Conclusions

The adaptive reuse of the Former Congregational Church in Ardingly as a single residential home will require thoughtful consideration to ensure a successful project that respects the building's historical and architectural merit.

The constraints identified—such as the careful handling of significant elevations, limited alteration to existing openings, and the sensitivity required if removing or replacing the more modern extensions—highlight the need

for a delicate and respectful approach to preserve the building's character and its contribution to the local heritage and street scene.

Conversely, the opportunities to revitalise a redundant site, integrate a compatible residential use, and enhance historical features offer significant benefits. By minimally intervening in the original structure and concentrating major amendments to the reconfiguration, removal or replacement of the rear extensions, the project can maintain its historical essence and save this building for longer term appreciation.

In summary, the potential of the Former Congregational Church provides an opportunity to preserve and enhance this historical building, ensuring its longevity and continued contribution to Ardingly's Conservation Area. With careful and sensitive design, the Former Congregational Church can be successfully transformed into a residential home that contributes positively to the village.