

4960 St
Benedict's
Church,
Ardwick for
Manchester
Vineyard

Design & Access Statement

July 2026



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Executive Summary

The proposals for St Benedict's Church present a rare opportunity to bring one of Manchester's most distinctive historic buildings back into active use, to reveal once again the architectural qualities that make it exceptional, and to secure its future through the reinstatement of its original purpose.

Designed by J. S. Crowther and consecrated in 1880, St Benedict's is a Grade II* listed building of outstanding architectural and historic interest. Crowther conceived a soaring urban church whose height, slender proportions and landmark tower responded to the tightly packed streets of nineteenth-century Ardwick. Internally, the lofty nave, clerestory windows, arcades and elaborate hammerbeam roof created a dramatic sequence of light, shadow and vertical space. Richly carved stonework, memorials, screens, stained glass and the great east and west windows gave the building both its sacred character and its remarkable visual power.

Following the church's closure, its conversion into a climbing centre provided an imaginative new use and played an important role in saving the building from vacancy and decline. Inevitably, however, the scale and density of the climbing structures transformed the interior. Climbing walls, bouldering structures, platforms, stairs and associated enclosures divided the nave and chancel, concealed significant features and prevented the original volume of the church from being fully understood or appreciated.

The present proposals are therefore as much an act of revelation as one of alteration. The removal of the climbing structures will reopen the principal interior and restore long-observed views through the nave, aisles and chancel. It will reveal the full height and rhythm of Crowther's arcades, the clerestory windows, the impressive double hammerbeam roof and its carved figureheads. At the west end, the removal of later coverings and the recommissioning of the historic doors will restore the visual relationship between the narthex, the Gothic entrance and the gallery above. Within the chancel and side chapels, the removal of redundant platforms, stairs and partitions will bring surviving panelling, memorials, screens and architectural details back into view.

This recovery of the building's historic character is made possible by its return to a living and sustainable use. Manchester Vineyard intends to establish St Benedict's once again as a place of worship, welcome and community life. The building will accommodate regular worship alongside meetings, training, pastoral support, children's activities, social-action work and community gatherings. The renewed occupation will provide the purpose, care and investment required to maintain the building over the long term. Rather than preserving St Benedict's as a static monument, the proposals will allow it to fulfil once more the social and spiritual role for which it was created.

The internal arrangement has been developed around the existing grain and hierarchy of the church. The nave will become the principal worship and meeting hall, allowing its scale and architectural drama to define the experience of the building. The area beneath the existing chancel mezzanine will provide a more intimate fellowship and meeting room. Between these spaces, a central welcome area will form the heart of the renewed church, connecting the principal entrance, nave, chancel and clergy house and providing a clear place of arrival, gathering and orientation.

New partitions will be limited in height and positioned so that views above and through the principal interior remain open. Their design will acknowledge the traditional materials and character of the church while remaining identifiable as contemporary work. New construction will be freestanding, lightly fixed and capable of future removal without lasting harm. Historic components affected by the works will be carefully recorded, protected and reused or stored, while conservation repairs will be undertaken once the removal of the climbing structures allows the condition of the original fabric to be fully assessed.

For the building to have a genuinely sustainable future, it must be capable of welcoming the widest possible range of people. Inclusive access is therefore fundamental to the proposals rather than an addition to them. The existing level entrance from the southern parking area will provide the principal

everyday entrance. A carefully formed opening through the north aisle wall will create a direct, level connection to the clergy house and its accessible facilities. A discreet glazed platform lift beside the chancel steps, together with the regularisation of floor levels at the east end, will provide access to the principal public areas of the nave, chancel and side aisles. The historic west doors will also be recommissioned, restoring their architectural and ceremonial importance.

The renewed use must also meet contemporary expectations for the safety and wellbeing of children, families and vulnerable users. Dedicated and appropriately supervised children's accommodation will be created within existing spaces, including a controlled room for infants and preschool children, facilities for school-age children and young adults, and a supervised children's toilet close to the principal activity areas. The layout will support clear supervision, controlled access and appropriate separation between age groups, while improvements to welfare facilities, ventilation and circulation will allow the building to operate safely and effectively.

These practical requirements have been integrated into the historic building with care. They are not competing with its significance; they are essential to making its continued use possible. By accommodating inclusive access, safeguarding, welfare and modern operational needs through measured and carefully detailed interventions, the proposals will allow St Benedict's to serve present and future generations without losing the qualities that make it special.

The proposals will secure more than the repair of a historic building. They will restore its presence, recover its architectural drama and return it to purposeful use. Through the careful removal of intrusive structures, the conservation of significant fabric and the introduction of proportionate measures for access and safeguarding, St Benedict's can begin a new chapter that is both authentic to its past and confident about its future.



1.00 Introduction

1.01 Background

This Design and Access Statement accompanies a formal application for Listed Building Consent for the conversion of the former climbing centre at St Benedicts Church, Ardwick.

The document has been prepared by BTP Architects (BTP) for our client, Manchester Vineyard (MV), and must be read in conjunction with the supporting information, including the Heritage Report prepared by Levrant.

Manchester Vineyard (MV) are in the process of purchasing the church and have already secured a Change of Use consent to re-establish its original use as a place of worship (Applic Ref 144478/FO/2025 approved 16th April 2026).

1.02 Purpose of Report

The Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015 sets out detailed requirements for the contents of Design & Access Statements.

Further advice is provided in Guidance on Information Requirements and Validation (2010) published by the Department of Communities and Local Government as well as in 'Design and Access Statements' as published by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

As such, one statement is required to cover both design and access, allowing applicants to demonstrate an integrated approach delivering inclusive design, responsive to context alongside addressing accessibility for intended user throughout the design process.

Both the design and access components should be informed by the current and historic site use and context.

For applications affecting the historic environment the key components of the D&AS are how the principles and concepts of the proposed acknowledge the significance of heritage assets, their special interests and setting.

1.03 Manchester Vineyard

Manchester Vineyard (MV) has been established since 2016 as a registered charitable organization and is an evangelical church that provides community for those who attend as well as seeking to support those in need via social action work within Manchester.

MV is part of a national organisation called Vineyard Churches UK & Ireland (VCUKI) which has around 140 churches spread across the country. VCUKI has been established for around 30 years and seeks to support and establish churches in the cities around the nation.

Generally, MV churches operate as a base for staff and volunteers, with daily training courses and meetings attended by approximately 40 church members. Once a week, parent and child support groups for up to 60 participants are held, and on occasion, larger training courses accommodating up to 100 people take place.

During the evenings and on most nights, the buildings host regular training and life coaching sessions for around 50 church members, with slightly larger events for 70 to 120 attendees occurring approximately three times per month.

At Weekends, Saturdays occasionally host daytime and evening training session or meeting events for groups of 30 to 60 people.



Each Sunday, a church service is held from 7am to 2pm. The service includes time for setup and social interaction, 30 minutes of worship songs, a talk, and age-appropriate programs for under-18s aimed at fostering friendship and community. In addition, there is the potential to hold a similar but smaller evening service for around 120 attendees, though this is not a regular activity at present.

Locally, the church has been shaped by a commitment to serve Manchester in a practical, outward-focused way, with an emphasis on community, generosity, and social impact.



The church has invested significantly in local initiatives, including the development of the "422" building as a café and community hub. However, it has not had a permanent home, instead meeting in a range of temporary venues across the city, including schools and hired spaces.

The proposed use of St Benedict's Church represents an opportunity to establish a long-term, sustainable base. This will enable regular worship, community programmes, and wider public use, while supporting the ongoing stewardship and active reuse of an important historic building for the benefit of the local community.



2.00 History and Context

2.01 The Site & Surroundings

The Site is situated in the Ardwick ward of Manchester and consists of St Benedicts Church, a Grade II* listed building since 1974 incorporating a tall nave with low aisle, tall north-west tower, a low 2-storey clergy house on north side with a paved car parking area to the south of the Site.

It is situated on St Benedicts Square with Bennett Street bounding to the north and Gregory Street to the east. Residential uses comprising one and two-storey homes lie to the south of the Site.



The Church is a landmark building within the local area, constructed in 1880 and designed by J. S. Crowther, a distinguished ecclesiastical architect noted for his restoration work on Manchester Cathedral in the 19th century.

The building functioned as a place of worship until its closure in December 2002, after which it was repurposed as an indoor climbing centre. The premises are now vacant following the departure of the climbing centre operator.

There are good public transport links to the Site. From Bennett Street there are several bus routes linking the Site to Manchester City Centre, as well as both north and south of the city with Ardwick train station approximately 17 minutes' walk away.



2.02 Brief History

St Benedict's Church was consecrated in 1880. It was designed by the important regional architect, Joseph Stretch Crowther. Crowther (1832-1893) was certainly one of the most important ecclesiastical architects practicing in the North West during the second half of the 19th century. His career did not produce a large number of buildings but those that he did design are of considerable importance.



The latter part of his life was dominated by the major project for the restoration of Manchester Cathedral after the collegiate church was raised to Cathedral status.

As well as St Benedict's Church, he was also responsible for the design of several other large urban churches including St Alban Cheetwood (now demolished) and St Mary Hulme (converted to apartments).

Other important churches of his are St Mary's Bury and the major rebuild of St Wilfred Northenden.

Crowther also had a distinguished academic career. His most important work was a major study of the medieval churches of Lincolnshire. This work is still referred to as an important survey of the churches of this county, and it is possible to see the influences of his study of 14th and 15th century churches in Lincolnshire in his church design.

Many of his churches are lofty and thinly proportioned and commonly used Decorated Gothic detailing.

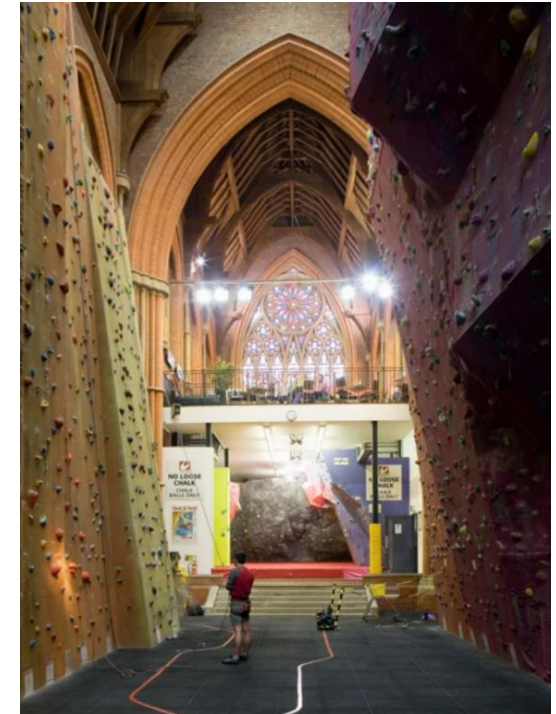
St Benedict's church was funded by an affluent timber merchant, John Marsland Bennett. A memorial to Bennett is to be found in the Lady Chapel of the church.



The original intention was for a comprehensive development on the site comprising of church and parsonage, parish room and accommodation for a religious community. The latter accommodation was to be built on the land to the south of the church which is currently open space. This part of the project was never undertaken.

Falling attendance in the 20th century saw the church declared redundant and the final celebration of Mass at St Benedict's took place on February 11th, 2002.

On March 15th, 2005, the church building reopened as the Manchester Climbing Centre. Its potential as an indoor climbing centre was identified by a British climber, John Dunne, who had been looking for a suitable building in which to establish a club in North West England.



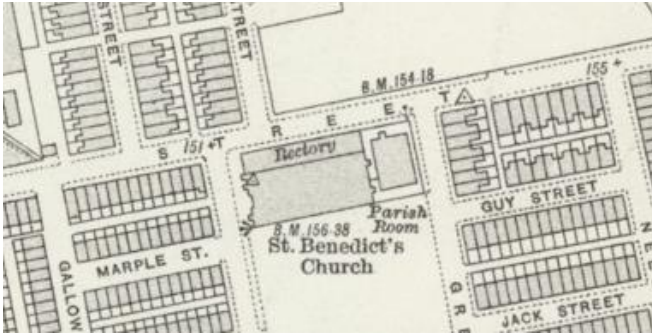
At the time of its opening, the centre provided a unique opportunity in the city and had one of the largest indoor climbing walls in Europe.

Sadly, over time other similar facilities have been developed across the region. The competition and the need to comprehensively upgrade the facilities once again resulted in the new use becoming unviable and the climbing centre closed in 2025.



2.03 The Original Building

The plan of the church is a simple rectangle nine bays long. The eastern three bays form the chancel with chapels in the side aisles. The nave is five bays long and again flanked by aisles. The western bay contains a west porch or narthex with a gallery over. A small organ, not original, sits on this gallery. Over the western end of the north aisle there is a tower with a slate covered spire.



Along the whole of the length of the north side of the church is parochial accommodation consisting of a parsonage house, mainly at first floor, and meeting rooms on the ground floor.

Crowther wanted a church with an atmosphere created by light and contrasting gloom. The aisle windows in the south side are small and the whole of the north aisle is blind. Daylight is brought in by substantial clerestory windows. These large windows have an ochre tinted glass giving a sense of gloom and mystery to the interior of the church and creating a focus on the Chancel.

The tall proportions of the church also reflect the historic townscape. Ardwick was once one of the most densely populated areas of Western Europe and the church at the time of construction was crowded around by terraced housing. It was therefore necessary to push the proportions of the church upwards and equally elongate the proportions of the tower.

The principal building material is a soft red brick used both internally and externally with details picked up in a buff-coloured sandstone.

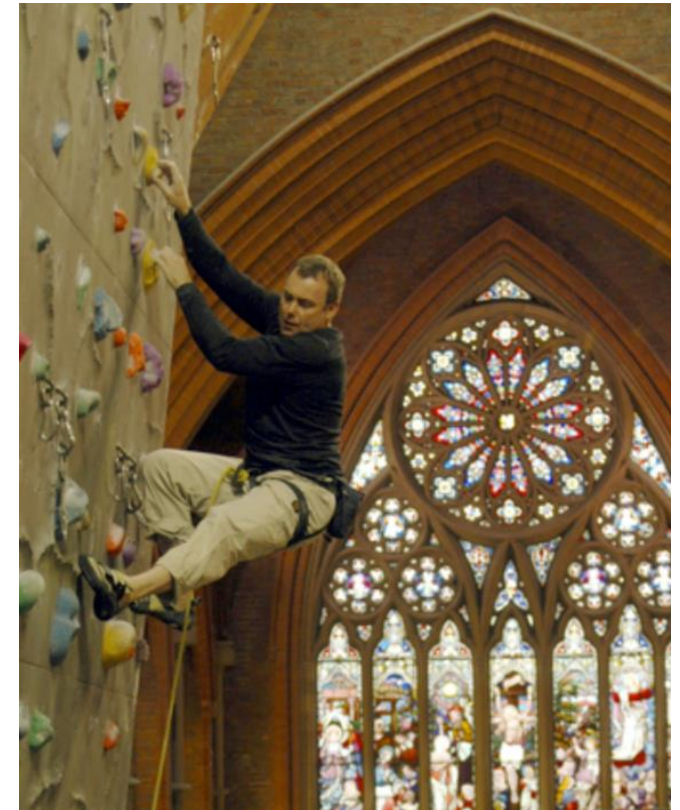


The stone is used for tracery in the windows, arcading and other carved detailing. Some of the carved work in stone was not completed notably on the west front.

In its original form, the church was sparsely furnished. There were fairly typical Victorian choir stalls and a raised altar in the chancel. In the 1960s all of this was removed and a baldacchino with Corinthian columns was inserted with a forward altar.

In its present configuration, the climbing wall structures in their various forms have radically changed the appearance of the building.

At the time of their insertion, it was considered that these would 'respect the architectural character' and would 'enable the interior volume of the church to still be appreciated'. Furthermore, it was argued that 'it will be possible to see above and beyond them so that the spatial quality of the original building can be seen'



2.04 Current Conditions

The imaginative repurposing of the building as a centre for climbing undoubtedly saved the building from a slow and tortuous decline. It also retained the external appearance of the church in its almost original state.

The interventions which received Listed Building Consent on December 5th, 2003, included the following five principal elements: -

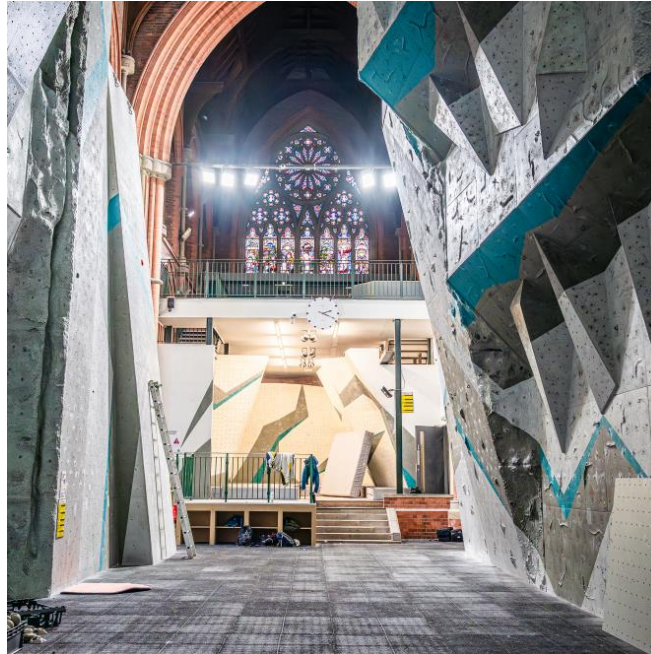
- a) Car Parking: A new car park was laid out with no impact on the historic fabric of the building. Level access was provided at the South Entrance without the need to alter the doorway. This would make the primary Nave floor level accessible to all.
- b) The Chancel was converted by the insertion of a mezzanine floor with a coffee shop on the new upper floor. The roof of the church and views of the east window were still possible but were impacted by the mezzanine structure. Beneath the mezzanine Bouldering Wall for climbing practice completely lined the existing Chancel walls.
- c) The Nave was converted by the insertion of the main climbing walls. These were built from steel frames in front of the arcading. Views of the clerestory windows and sections of the arcading were still possible but inevitably compromised. The view of the oculus window in the west wall was also diminished. The aisles are principally be used for circulation and access.
- d) The present vestry spaces were converted to create male/female toilets and changing facilities with some locker/storage space.
- e) The Clergy House/Presbytery was to remain in its historic configuration and there were no plans for alterations to this part of the building at that time.

The proposals also included for the formation of a new fully accessible WC at the west end of the Clergy House/Presbytery and the formation of a lift enclosure which would provide space for a lift installation to access the first floor of that wing.

Generally, the alterations have been implemented in line with the LBC given at that time and the current configuration is true to the approved scheme.

Whilst the external appearance is little altered, the internal configuration of climbing wall structures in their various forms, along with the mezzanine floor/stairs of the Chancel, have radically changed the interior.

At the time of their insertion, it was considered that these would 'respect the architectural character' and would 'enable the interior volume of the church to still be appreciated'. Furthermore, it was argued that 'it will be possible to see above and beyond them so that the spatial quality of the original building can be seen'.



With the benefit of hindsight, this assessment could be considered as a little optimistic.

The excess of climbing paraphernalia clutters Crowther's spacious interior, masking much of the fine detailing. Whilst glimpsed views of the windows are possible, they are inevitably clipped. Much of the roof structure and the fine carvings to the hammer beam ends are obscured. The visual discord also unavoidably impacts on any real appreciation of the massing and volume of the original design and the aforementioned 'spatial quality'.



It should also be noted that the construction of the new interventions was, at the time, considered to be 'reversible' except for the mass concrete foundations. These would be constructed below the existing floor level and have little visual impact on the historic visual appearance.



Having been given Listed Building Consent, these 'new' features must now be considered as part of the protected fabric, and this must be fully considered in any future proposals for further change.



2.05 Historic Environmental Context

The church is recorded on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) by Historic England as follows:-

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II***

List Entry Number: **1207939**

Date first listed: **03-Oct-1974**

Date of most recent amendment: **06-Jun-1994**

List Entry Name: **Anglican Church of St Benedict**

National Grid Reference: **SJ 86558 96989**

Details

Church incorporating clergy house and Sunday School rooms, now parish rooms. 1880, by JS Crowther. Red brick in header bond with orange brick dressings and stone tracery, slate roofs. Early English style. Tall nave with low aisle to south side, tall north-west tower and low 2-storey clergy house on north side. Tall chancel with low transepts. The buttressed west front has a 2-centred arched west doorway with 3 orders of moulding including shafts, containing 2 cusped doorways and traceried tympanum, a multifoil each side, a band of tall blank arcading with shafts, and a large rose window. The tower to the left, square, buttressed up to eaves level and with 3 stages above that, has a 2-light window at ground floor, a small lancet to each of the next 3 stages, and a belfry stage with tourelle pinnacles, louvred 2-light windows, a machicolated pierced parapet and steep pyramidal roof. The 6-bay south side has pilaster strips and large 2-centred arched 4-light windows with geometrical tracery to the nave, small lancets to the aisle; the chancel has windows like those of the nave and coupled gabled transepts below, and a very large 7-light east window with rich geometrical tracery. The clergy house on the north side, 2 low storeys and 11 bays, with coupled gables at both ends, has segmental-pointed windows to ground floor, arched windows to 1st floor, and 4 gabled dormers in the roof, with finials.

INTERIOR: stone quatrefoil piers support brick arcades and tall clerestory. Elaborate hammerbeam and arch-braced roofs to nave and chancel. Chancel raised above height of nave and approached by wide flight of 6 steps

(somewhat altered in C20). Baldacchino of c1960, but original iron parclose screens. Stained glass east window of c.1885. Brick chancel wall with integral stone lectern supported by life-size sculpture of angel. This is c.1900 by W Cecil Hardisty and EF Long. Pulpit of 1907. Vestry furnishings include cupboards and wardrobes designed by Crowther. Stained glass includes aisle windows by TF Curtis, Ward and Hughes and others probably mostly by Ward and Hughes. Stained glass also in the large west rose window.

This soaring church was cleverly integrated with the brick terraces which formerly surrounded it by the 2-storey clergy house and rooms attached to its north flank. The ensemble is the most original of JS Crowther's church designs.



3.00 Proposals

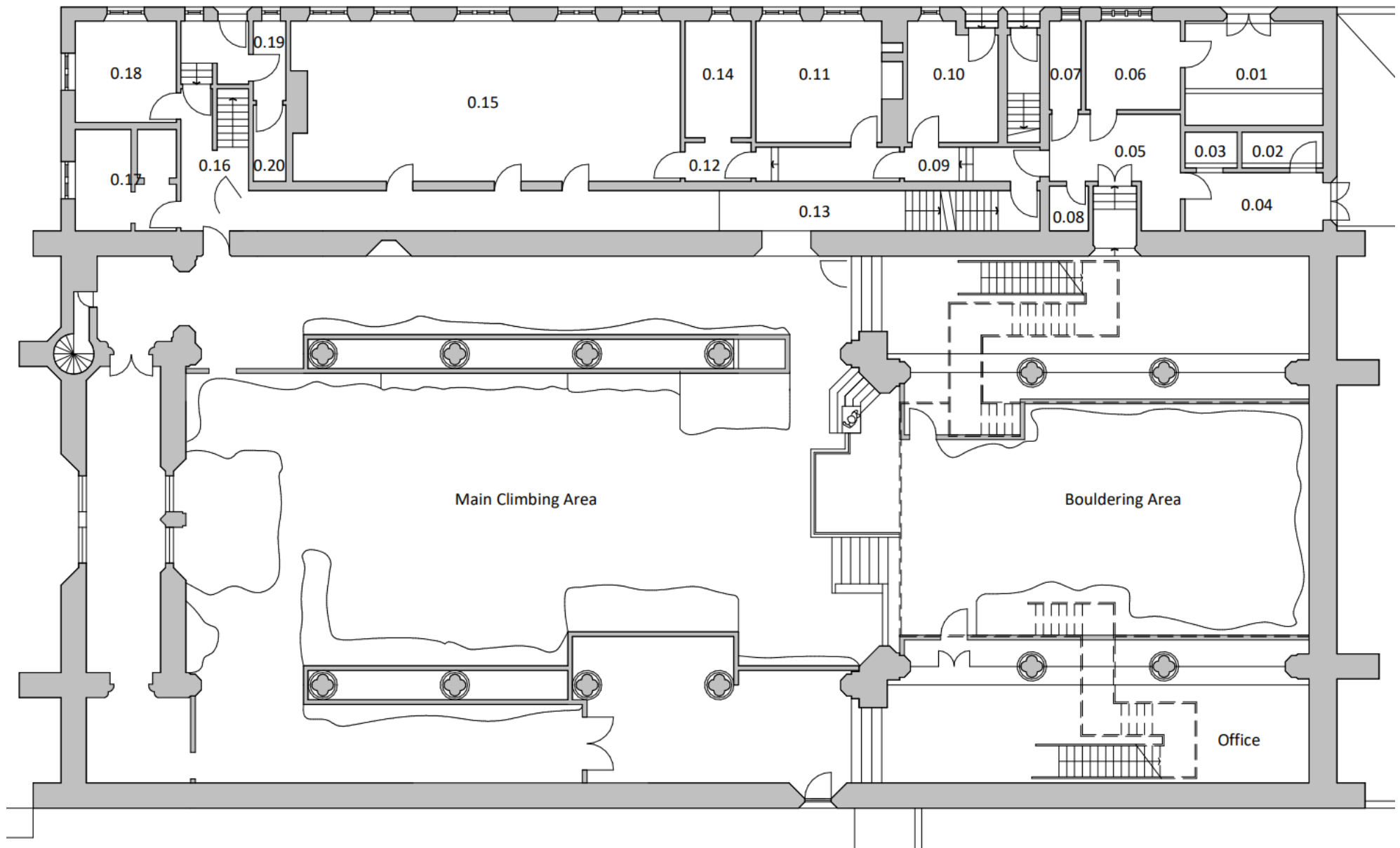
3.01 Concept

The attached use/zoning plan explains Manchester Vineyard's proposed uses for the different parts of the existing building. This endeavours to work with the existing 'grain' of the building to limit the need for intervention to the minimum required to deliver the uses.

The proposals fall into the following principal design components: -

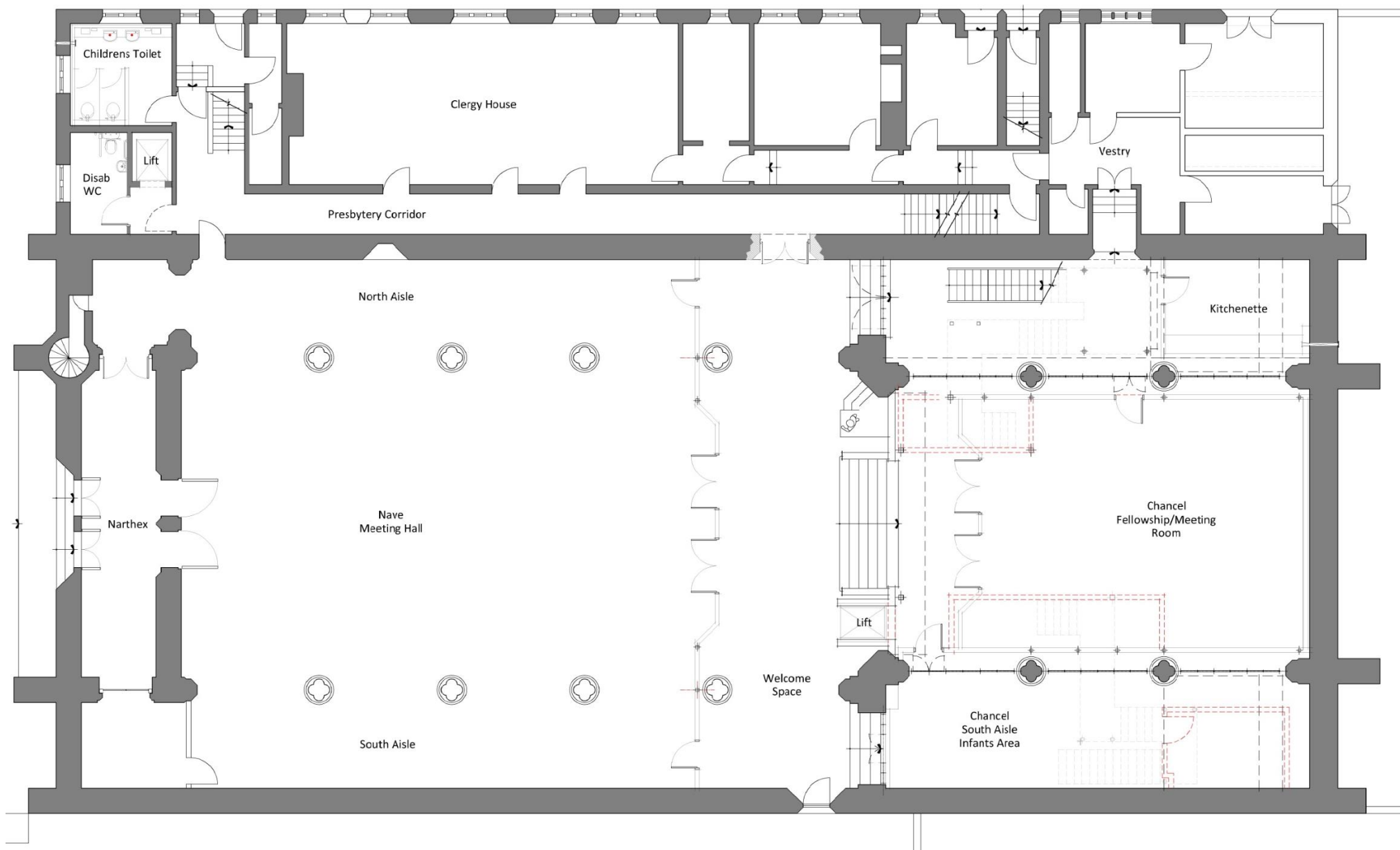
- The entrance door into the South Aisle will be the principal entrance and will be used for general access to the church for worship, meetings and events. This door is fully accessible and has a level threshold from the parking area.
- The configuration of the external steps to the West Doors limits accessibility for all users. However, the original doors are to be repaired/re-commissioned to allow ceremonial use for larger worship/gatherings where this is appropriate.
- The proposals will use new free-standing partitions to create a principal Worship/Meeting Hall in the main body of the Nave with a smaller Fellowship/Meeting Room at ground floor level in the Chancel beneath the existing Mezzanine floor.
- Between the two areas, an Entrance/Welcome area will provide level access from the car park via the existing south entrance door to the ground floor level of the Nave and the Clergy House/Presbytery. This zone will link all the other areas to a central gathering/orientation space as the hub of the reinvigorated church.
- A new opening in the existing wall of the North Aisle will provide a direct level access through into the Clergy House/Presbytery corridor allowing access to the Children's Toilet/Accessible Toilet at the west end of the corridor
- The use of the existing spaces found in middle section (ground floor) of the Clergy House/Presbytery for children of school age and young adults makes an efficient use of the existing spaces with no change in the layout/configuration.
- The various floor levels of what was the South/Lady Chapel and the North Chapel will be regularised at that of the Chancel so that a single floor plate connects all spaces at the east end. A contemporary platform lift from the Entrance/Welcome zone will provide access for all users.
- The removal of the existing enclosed office and the mezzanine access stair in the Chancel South Aisle (Lady Chapel) will allow the creation of single acoustically separate room for Infants/Preschool children during worship/meetings.
- The creation of a level floor in the Chancel area allows the construction of a space at the east end of the Chancel North Aisle (Chapel) for a limited refreshments facility linked directly to the adjacent Fellowship/Meeting Room but also to the other zones accessible from the Entrance/Welcome Area.
- At the east end (ground floor) of the Clergy House/Presbytery, the conversion of the Office space provides a dedicated Supervised Children's Toilet which satisfies safeguarding requirements. Its location adjacent to the existing Accessible Toilet/Lift Enclosure provides a practical connection to the existing water/waste services.
- At the west end of the Clergy House/Presbytery (ground floor), the existing toilets, showers and service rooms are to be retained as found and refurbished/redecorated to provide adult welfare facilities and storage.





Existing Ground Floor (not to scale).





Proposed Ground Floor Plan (not to scale).



3.02 Removal of Climbing Structures

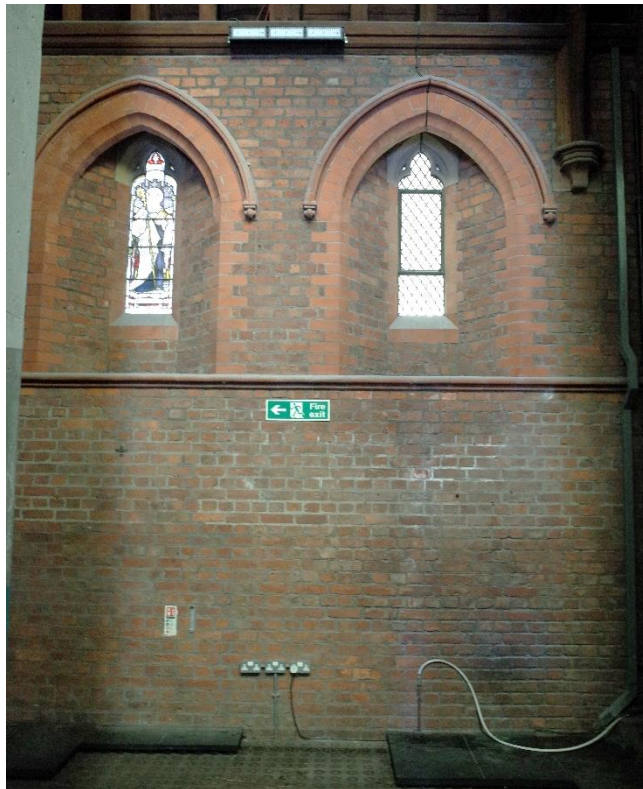
Comment –

It is accepted that the interventions made to repurpose the original church as a climbing centre are now legally considered a part of the protected heritage by way of the established LBC. However, the current proposals to restore the buildings use as a place of worship should first and foremost, be measured by their impact on the values of the original fabric and not that inserted in 2004. This is reflected in the narrative below.

Original Fabric (pre 2004)

New door opening in the North Aisle

A new double door opening will be formed in the North Aisle wall to provide direct and level access between the principal entrance/arrival/greeting area and the children/young adults area.



The new opening will facilitate direct access to the new children's supervised toilet facilities at the west end of the Clergy House/Presbytery corridor.

The existing wall is to be propped/needled to structural engineers' details to allow the careful dismantling of the brickwork and the insertion of the new lintols. The bricks are to be cleaned and all mortar residue removed and set aside for reuse in forming the new reveals. Any unused bricks are to be stored on pallets in a well-ventilated/dry area in the basement for potential future use.

Details of how the opening is to be framed, and its dressing/detailing are explained further in the subsequent section 3.03 Interventions

Justification/Mitigation –

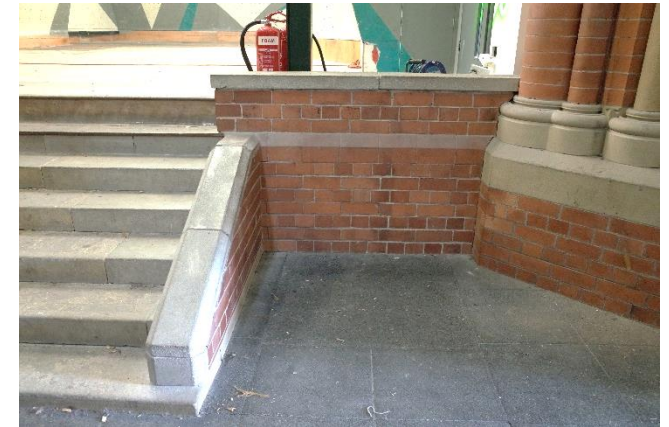
The formation of the new opening will allow direct and level access between the principal entrance/arrival/greeting area and the facilities provided in the Clergy House/Presbytery. This will remove the need for an additional adjoining corridor in the Nave/North Aisle and will make the major activity areas at ground floor level accessible to all users.

The original fabric which is affected is the least amount necessary to create the level threshold and double door opening. The dismantled components are to be carefully protected, fully labelled and stored in a well-ventilated area of the basement. The stored components will be capable of being reinstated at a future date should this become necessary.

New opening in the low wall to the Chancel steps

A section approximately 1000mm wide of the low wall at the top of the Nave/Chancel steps (south side) is to be carefully removed to provide a level access point from the platform lift which is to be provided in this location.

The cast concrete coping stone and course of bricks below are to be cleaned with all mortar residue removed and set aside for potential reuse elsewhere.



Justification/Mitigation –

The removal of this small section of low wall is required to ensure the two principal floor levels within the worship space are fully accessible using the proposed platform lift.

The present configuration of the Chancel wall and the Chancel steps are not part of the original design and are likely to have been part of the changes implemented in the 1960's when the original raised altar was replaced with the baldacchino and a forward looking altar.

The listed fabric affected is the least amount necessary to create the level threshold and the dismantled components, irrespective of their date of origin, are to be carefully protected, fully labelled and stored in a well-ventilated area of the basement. The stored components will be capable of being reinstated at a future date should this become necessary.

Contemporary Fabric (post 2004)

Climbing Walls to the Nave

Existing climbing walls in the Nave are formed in steel frames clad with plywood/climbing boards anchored down to mass concrete pad foundations formed in the sub floor void below the existing level of the Nave. The walls vary in height and alignment and extend high into the ornate double hammer beam roof structure to the Nave.



All of the climbing wall structures into the Nave are to be carefully dismantled and removed. The mass concrete pads below the original floor are to be left in places as removal would have a disproportionate consequential impact to adjacent area of historic fabric.



Once the stripping out of the climbing walls has been completed and historic fabric is fully exposed, the architect is to provide a making good schedule to fully record all conservation repairs to fixings and junctions with the original fabric. This is to include methodology and specification for making good the floor in matching materials and finishes.

Where the climbing wall frames are anchored back to the historic fabric, the bolt fixings are to be fully removed to ensure that no embedded ferrous fixings are left in the masonry. The resultant holes are to be pointed in lime mortar coloured with ground dust reclaimed from the adjacent masonry/mortar to provide a good colour match.

Justification/Mitigation –

The climbing walls are not original fabric and the temporary insertion as part of the 2004 LBC has now reached the end of their intended life.

The removal of the structures will restore lost views and allow a full appreciation of the spatial quality, massing and volume of Crowthers original design. It will fully reveal the

impressive double hammer beam roof structure and the carved figure heads to the end of the hammer beams.

At the west end, removal of the over cladding to the Narthex will reveal the imposing entrance doors set within an ornated Gothic arched opening and the pierced balustrade detailing to the Gallery above.

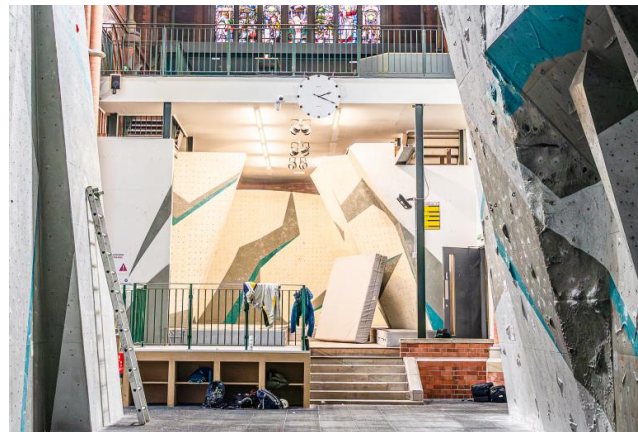
The removal will facilitate the reuse of the building as a place of worship and acknowledges that by returning it to its original form/function, this limits harm to the special architectural interest of the original design.

Converting the Nave back to its original use offers significant benefits, primarily by protecting/reinstating its historic authenticity, removal of invasive modern alterations, and restoring the architectural integrity of the structure and its surroundings.

Bouldering Walls to the Chancel

Existing 'bouldering' walls in the Chancel are formed in timber/steel frames clad with plywood/climbing boards. The structures are screwed/bolted to the original floor and are tied back to the adjacent walls with bolt fixings.

These structures are to be carefully dismantled/removed.



Where the climbing wall frames are anchored back to the historic fabric, the bolt fixings are to be fully removed to ensure that no embedded ferrous fixings are left in the masonry. The resultant holes are to be pointed in lime mortar coloured with ground dust reclaimed from the adjacent masonry/mortar to provide a good colour match.



Justification/Mitigation –

The 'bouldering' walls are not original fabric and the temporary insertion as part of the 2004 LBC has now reached the end of their intended life.

The removal will facilitate the reuse of the building as a place of worship and offers significant benefits, primarily by protecting/reinstating its historic authenticity, removing invasive modern alterations, and restoring the architectural integrity of the church.

South Stair to Mezzanine and Office Structure in Chancel South Aisle (Lady Chapel)

The existing freestanding access stair to the Mezzanine from the Chancel South Aisle is to be carefully dismantled and removed. Any fixing points into adjacent areas of historic masonry are to be made good as noted elsewhere.



Access to the Mezzanine floor area is to be limited to occasional use for informal meetings and there is no need to provide two stairs for escape purposes.

Justification/Mitigation –

The south mezzanine stair is not original fabric and the practical need for two staircase structures to serve the mezzanine is no longer required.

The removal will facilitate the reuse of the building as a place of worship and will allow the creation of a controlled space for infants/preschool children during worship/events. This addresses requirements for safeguarding and the potential for noise transfer between the defined use areas.

The removal of the office partitions will open up the space fully revealing the panelling/memorials on the south/east walls allowing a greater appreciation of these historic features.

Platform over Chancel Steps

The raised viewing platform over the Chancel steps is constructed in timber framing and plywood cladding which is screwed down to the original floor structure.



The platform is to be carefully dismantled and removed to reveal the original feature. Any fixings are to be fully removed, and the resultant holes are to be made good to match the adjacent finishes.

Justification/Mitigation –

The viewing platform is not original fabric, and the practical need is redundant. The removal will facilitate the reuse of the building as a place of worship and offers significant benefits, primarily by protecting/reinstating its historic authenticity, removing invasive modern alterations, and restoring the architectural integrity of the Chancel steps and its surroundings.

3.03 Interventions

West End Entrance Doors & Narthex

Original west end entrance doors are to be recommissioned to allow ceremonial use for larger worship/gatherings.

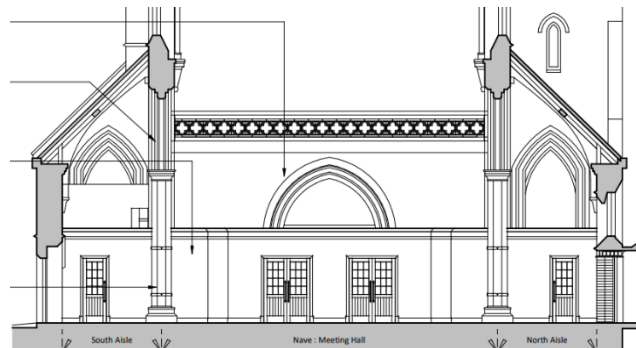
The missing north leaf of the original paired doors from the Narthex into the Nave is to be retrieved from storage elsewhere in the church and refixed/recommissioned in its original location using the original ironmongery.

Justification/Mitigation –

The restoration of the original doors offers significant benefits, primarily by protecting/reinstating its historic authenticity, and restoring the architectural integrity of the west entrance and Narthex.

Subdividing partition to the east end of the Nave

To define the primary Worship/Meeting Hall space it is proposed that a free-standing partition sub divides the Nave at the first column line from the Chancel Steps. The partition would be configured to go behind the columns at the North and South Aisles and would be a maximum of 3000mm high.



The partition will terminate with an oak cornice and rail at 3000mm high will include for two pairs of glazed oak doors with associated oak skirtings/architraves in a restrained arts and crafts styling. Matching single leaf glazed doors will be provided in the Aisles to allow for greater flexibility in use.

The structural posts required to provide rigidity, will be positioned to coincide with the existing mass concrete pads of the removed climbing walls avoiding the need for further interventions.

Clamp band fixings to the two Nave columns follow the pattern of existing bands used on the parclose screens and will provide additional lateral restraint with a minimal impact on the original fabric



The partitions will be simple studwork structures screwed/bolted at the sole plate into the existing floor.

Justification/Mitigation –

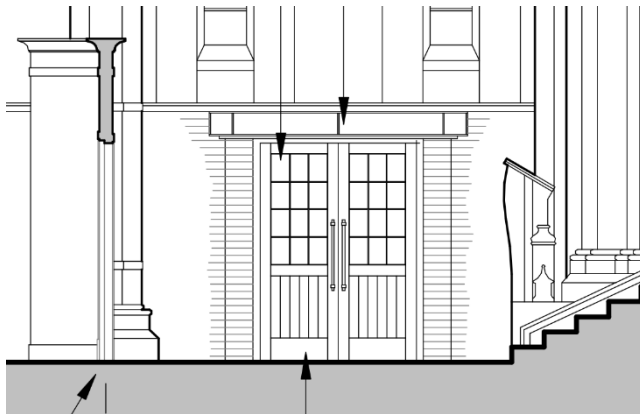
The new partition is required to create a separate area for larger group worship and meetings/events. Whilst these need to have a degree of privacy there is no need to provide acoustic separation, and the partition height has been limited to 3000mm so that views upward and through the Nave are maintained so that the architectural integrity of the volume/massing of the Nave can be appreciated from all aspects.

The new structure is reversible and requires minimal connections to the original fabric most notably at its base where it will be fixed into the much-altered original floorboards/structure. The proposed fixings can be simply made good to match the original should the partition be removed at a future date.

The structure has been designed to have the least possible physical impact on the existing historic characteristics and features of the church. It has also been designed to be clearly legible as a contemporary intervention adopting a traditional appearance which will complement the Gothic character of Crowthers original design.

New door opening in the North Aisle

A new double door opening will be formed in the North Aisle wall to provide access from the principal entrance/arrival/greeting area and the Clergy House/Presbytery.



The new doors/opening will also allow access to the supervised children's toilet and the accessible toilet at the west end of the Clergy House/Presbytery.

Existing wall is to be propped/needled to structural engineers' details to allow the careful dismantling of the brickwork and the insertion of the new pre-cast concrete lintols.

On each side the concrete lintols are to be faced with an exposed steel channel to express the new opening and to

clearly identify the proposed intervention as a contemporary feature in contrast to the Decorated Gothic detailing Crowther uses on other openings.

The removed bricks are to be cleaned and all mortar residue removed and set aside for reuse in forming the new reveals.

The reveals to the new opening are to be formed in splayed brickwork to echo that used on other door/window openings.

The underside of the new opening is to be lined in a 38mm thick oak board to dress the exposed bottom edge of the lintols.

The opening will accommodate a pair of glazed oak doors with associated oak skirtings/architraves in a restrained arts and crafts styling. The glazed upper panels will provide a direct visual link between the principal entrance/arrival/greeting area and the activities in the Clergy House/Presbytery.

Justification/Mitigation –

The formation of the new opening will allow direct and level access between the principal entrance/arrival/greeting area and the facilities provided in the Clergy House/Presbytery.

This will make efficient use of the available space and will remove the need for additional new partitioning to form a corridor in the Nave/North Aisle and will make the major activity areas at ground floor level accessible to all users.

The fabric which is affected is the least amount necessary to create a level threshold and double door opening.

The dismantled components which are not reused are to be carefully protected, fully labelled and stored in a well-ventilated area of the basement. The stored components will be capable of being reinstated at a future date should this become necessary.

The structure has been designed to have the least possible physical impact on the existing historic characteristics and features of the church.

It has also been designed to be clearly legible as a contemporary intervention adopting a traditional appearance which complements Crowthers original design.

Platform lift to south side of Chancel steps.

Form new opening in low wall to Chancel to suit new platform lift providing an accessible route to the Chancel floor level.

Platform lift to be formed on stainless steel plinth on each side with toughened glass sides and doors to minimise impact and allow views through to all sides.



Justification/Mitigation –

The installation is required to ensure the two principal floor levels within the worship space (Nave and Chancel) are fully accessible to all users.

The original fabric which is affected is the least amount necessary to create the level threshold.

The dismantled components are to be carefully protected, fully labelled and stored in a well-ventilated area of the basement. The stored components will be capable of being reinstated at a future date should this become necessary.

The new platform lift structure has been designed to be clearly legible as a contemporary intervention whilst the use of a primarily glass structure will maintain views of the surrounding historic fabric.

Levelling the floor across the Chancel South Aisle (Lady Chapel) and North Aisle (Chapel)

The much-altered floor structures to the aisles each side of the Chancel (previously Chapels) are to be levelled to be consistent throughout the east end.



Justification/Mitigation –

The proposed is required to ensure the floor level throughout the east end (Chancel and side aisles) are fully accessible to all users.

Where possible, the limited original structures which remain will be retained, and the new level floor will be constructed to sit on top thereby minimising the removal of further historic fabric.

Partition at the South Aisle Chancel Steps

The arch way at the head of the steps into the Chancel from the South Aisle is to be infilled with a new solid stud partition.

In its present configuration the steps combined with the various levels in the adjoining Chancel South Aisle (Lady Chapel) limit access.

The partition is to be fixed at the rear (east) side of the arch so the wrought/cast iron screen can be retained in its original position even though access to the Chancel South Aisle (Lady Chapel) is no longer available.

The paired gates to the screen are to be retrieved from storage in the Nave (inside the climbing walls) and refixed in their original position on screen.

Gates are to be secured in the closed position immediately in front of new partition to infill arch way at top of steps.

Justification/Mitigation –

The proposed intervention allows the creation of a controlled space for infants/preschool children during worship/events. This addresses requirements for safeguarding and the potential for noise transfer between the defined use areas.

Whilst the introduction of the solid partition further impacts on the historic circulation pattern, the reinstatement of the stored gates restores the original feature.

Partition in the Chancel.

At the head of the Chancel steps a level area is to be left in front of a new partition wall from floor to the underside of the Mezzanine.



The partition will incorporate an oak cornice and rail at 3000mm high reflecting the detail at the head of the freestanding partition to the Nave.

The partition is to include for two pairs of glazed oak doors with associated oak skirtings/architraves in a restrained arts and crafts styling.

The east wall of the Chancel up to the underside of the Mezzanine floor over is to be drylined with an independent stud wall with plasterboard and skim finish to the Fellowship/Meeting Room.

Justification/Mitigation –

The introduction of the Mezzanine floor structure and the partition walls each side of the Chancel in 2004 has diminished the legibility of the Chancel as a sacred space.

Kitchenette in the Chancel North Aisle (Chapel)

At the east end of the Chancel North Aisle a new Kitchenette is to be formed in a stud partition with a plasterboard ceiling formed on softwood joists.

This will provide basic facilities for serving refreshments directly into the adjacent Fellowship/Meeting Room via the existing gates in the central section of the Parclose screen and through the new door inserted into the existing partition.

The original wall panelling will be retained in situ but will be boxed in on the east wall for approximately 750mm to protect the panelling where the units will be located.

Mechanical ventilation is to be taken through east wall in a 100mm dia. core drilled duct and to terminate in a black cast iron conservation vent grille fixed to the external brickwork.

Justification/Mitigation –

The proposed provides rudimentary facilities for the preparation of basic refreshments to serve fellowship/meetings. This positively supports the wider reuse of the building as a place of worship.

The layout requires minimal removal of any historic fabric. Where the kitchen units meet the east wall, the original panelling will be protected by a freestanding partition wall fixed in front of the panelling with the return scribed around the profile of the existing.



The proposed works are truly reversible and can be removed at a future date if necessary.

The external black cast iron conservation grille to the ventilation ductwork adopts an appearance which is in keeping with the Victorian origins of the building. The size of the core drilled duct is the minimum possible in providing the air changes required.

Supervised Children's Toilet

The new doors/opening in the North Aisle Wall (see previous note) will also allow access to the supervised children's toilet and the accessible toilet at the west end of the Clergy House/Presbytery.

The existing accessible toilet with baby changing facility and the adjacent lift enclosure (installed 2004) are to be refurbished/redecorated.

The corner office adjacent to the accessible toilet is to be converted into a supervised Children's Toilet.

The existing windows to the west and north walls of this room have already been blanked off externally with signage panels and the room has no natural light or ventilation.

It is proposed that the west and north walls are dry lined with a freestanding stud frame taken up to just above the window heads and then capped off back to the existing walls so as to be clear of and retain fully the original ceiling cornice detail.

The cap is to have hidden slot openings to allow air circulation/ventilation behind the new plasterboard in the void created against the existing external wall. At low level, further black painted aluminium grilles just above skirting level will encourage a positive air flow.

A new skirting will match the existing and will be scribed into the existing where they meet.

A preformed cubicle system with concealed cisterns and a matching vanity unit with two inset sinks will be fitted

inside the new linings with all drainage/waste in concealed pipework leading back to the existing soil pipe in the adjacent accessible WC.

Mechanical ventilation is to be taken through west wall in a 100mm dia. core drilled duct and to terminate in a black cast iron conservation vent grille fixed to the external brickwork.

Justification/Mitigation –

Windows on two elevations makes the adaption of this room as toilet facilities challenging.

However, the size of the space and its proximity to existing drainage and water services in the adjacent accessible toilet minimises the need for extensive new pipework or complex service solutions.

The wall linings will allow flexibility in the layout of the new facility and will provide a robust envelope to assist with routine cleaning/maintenance

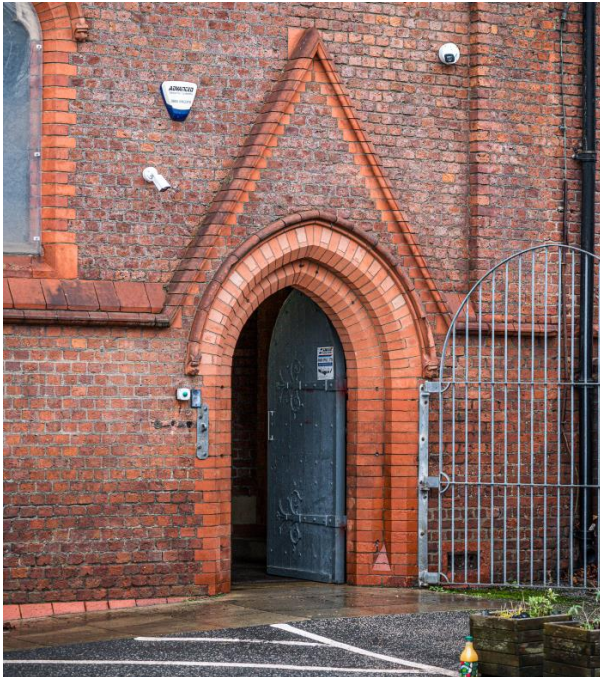
The linings will allow all the existing original window features/linings to be retained, and the ceilings cornices to be retained. The new intervention will be entirely reversible and there will be no loss of original fabric. The external black cast iron conservation grille to the ventilation ductwork adopts an appearance which is in keeping with the Victorian origins of the building. The size of the core drilled duct is the minimum possible in providing the air changes required.



3.04 Access Statement

Section 3.01 Concept has highlighted the client's requirement for the spatial arrangement to allow for the full accessibility to primary public areas – the Nave, the Chancel and the Clergy House/Presbytery.

In everyday use, the entrance door into the South Aisle will be the principal entrance and will be used for general access to the church for worship, meetings and events. This door is fully accessible and has a level threshold from the parking area directly into the Nave.



The introduction of a freestanding platform lift on the south side of the Chancel steps, then provides access to the raised level of the Chancel.

Accessibility is further enhanced through regularising all the principal floor level at the east end (Chancel South and North Aisles/Chapels) to match that of the Chancel.

The formation of a new door in the North Aisle then provides unencumbered access to the Clergy House/Presbytery area and most importantly the Accessible Toilet and the Supervised Children's Toilet at the west end.

From here, the lift enclosure approved through the LBC of 2004 will ultimately allow access to the principal first floor area in the Clergy House/Presbytery.

The only area which will not be accessible in this will be the Mezzanine floor. MV intend that this is only used sporadically for small informal meetings/events and it is likely that this will be reinforced in due course by an adopted Fire Strategy.

MV recognise the historic importance of the ceremonial entrance at the west end. However, in their present configuration of the external steps to the west end entrance doors means they are not accessible to all users.

Whilst there is sufficient space to reconfigure the arrangements/levels to provide full accessibility, the current project does not have the financial resources available for this.

As an interim response, the original doors are to be repaired/recommissioned to allow ceremonial use for larger worship/gatherings where this is appropriate. The provision of a temporary demountable ramp structure will ensure the access is available for all.



4.00 Planning History

The planning history and previous uses of the Site, as outlined below, indicate that the building has historically been used exclusively as either a place of worship or an indoor climbing facility

Application 070151/LO/2003/N

LISTED BUILDINGS CONSENT - Internal alterations as part of conversion of church to a climbing centre including installation of climbing walls, removal of baldacchino and formation of mezzanine floor plus ancillary work and formation of external disabled access ramp. Approved – 16 April 2004

Application 070150/FO/2003/N2

Conversion of redundant church to an indoor climbing centre including cafe and shop on mezzanine level, including erection of climbing walls & formation of car park with 4m high security lighting columns and 2.4m high steel railings and gates. Approved - 16 April 2004



5.00 Planning Policy Context

The Heritage Statement prepared by Levrant and submitted in support of the application for Listed Building Consent, fully establishes the Policy Context.

For completeness, the following are considered relevant to the current proposals:

- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (2019 and as subsequently amended)
- Manchester City Core Strategy (2012)
- Manchester City Council Saved UDP Policies (1995)
- Guide to Development in Manchester SPD (April 2007)
- Places for Everyone (PfE) 2024
- Historic England Guidance including:
 - Advice Note 12 'Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets' (2019)
 - Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 2 'Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment' (2015).
 - Technical Advice Note 2: Making Changes to Heritage Assets (2016).

The above documents remain the key policy and guidance relevant to the application proposals. Whilst there is a new draft of the NPPF, it has not yet been adopted and so is not relevant to this application.



Conclusion

The conversion of St Benedicts into a climbing centre in 2004 was instrumental in saving the church from the catastrophic loss that would have inevitably resulted through prolonged vacancy. The practical and financial challenges of maintaining empty places of worship are such that once redundant, deterioration rapidly accelerates to the point of no return. The insertion of the climbing walls along with the associated paraphernalia secured a positive use and a committed stewardship despite the overbearing impact that the change had on the building's architecture.

At the time, it was argued that the new structures erected within the historic shell would allow the qualities of the original design and the features of the building to remain dominant. This has not proved to be the case.

The solid climbing structures have provided impenetrable barriers rising high into the hammer beam roof. These have become the defining features of the interior space overpowering Crowthers composition.

Fortunately, the doctrine of 'reversibility' was at the forefront of the design of the new interventions. They generally touch the historic fabric lightly and with care. Their removal can be achieved with only minor 'scarring' of the original fabric whilst the mass concrete pads which lie hidden in the sub floor void will remain in situ.

Competition and the need for continual investment in the facilities has meant that the innovative use has not delivered long-term viability and the church once again finds itself at a crossroads. Another period of vacancy would risk the building being drawn back into abandonment and ultimately, loss.

The purchase of the building by Manchester Vineyard provides a unique opportunity to prevent this scenario and deliver a positive reuse which restores the building's original function as a place of worship.

Their vision is to reinstate the experience of Crowther's church: a soaring, gothic interior in which the nave, roof, windows, arcades, screens and memorials can once again be seen and understood as a coherent whole. At the same time, the modest interventions proposed will provide a warm, active and welcoming environment, rooted in its history but equipped for contemporary community life.

This inevitably requires a degree of change, but this will be deferential to the original design and will acknowledge the need for reversibility. There will be some loss, but any limited impact will be outweighed by the practical benefits delivered in terms of circulation and facilities. The new features will be clearly legible as contemporary interventions but will adopt materials and details which reflect those established by Crowthers original design. MV's proposals for change are reasonable, transparent and consistent. Where proposed, the degree of change is the least necessary to deliver the benefit and will have an essentially neutral impact on the listed buildings heritage values.

Most importantly, MV's future stewardship ensures that the buildings original use – its optimum viable use – is reinstated and that once restored, the use is capable of both sustaining the place and avoids or minimises harm to its intrinsic values.

