



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 November 2025

by Ann Veevers BA(Hons) Dip(BCon) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/U4230/W/25/3371442

St Johns Church, Bolton Rd, Pendlebury, Salford M27 8XS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Clive Morris against the decision of Salford City Council.
 - The application Ref is PA/2025/0538.
 - The development proposed is installation of solar panels.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for installation of solar panels at St Johns Church, Bolton Road, Pendlebury, Salford M27 8XS in accordance with the terms of the application Ref PA/2025/0538, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development must be begun not later than three years beginning with the date of this permission.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
 - Drawing ref: 01 Rev. V3 - Site Location Plan
 - Drawing ref: 03 Rev. V3 - Proposed Block Plan
 - Drawing ref: 07 Rev. V3 - Proposed Elevations
 - Drawing ref: 05 Rev. V3 - Proposed Plans
 - 3) The Solar Panels installed shall be those specified in the JASolar information leaflet as 455W MBB Half-Cell PERC Module JAM78S10 435-455/MR series.
 - 4) No development hereby permitted shall be begun unless and until a Method Statement for the proposed works has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The method statement shall include details of how the panels would be installed on the roof, including details of openings and fixings, cable run and associated equipment, including the battery, inverter and control panel.

Thereafter, the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and retained as such thereafter.
 - 5) In the event that the solar panels, mounting system, or associated equipment are removed at any time, the roof and any affected building fabric shall be fully reinstated in to its condition before the solar panels were installed within 2 months of their removal.

Preliminary Matters

2. The address on the Council's decision notice more accurately reflects the location of the appeal site than that on the application form. I have therefore used it in the banner heading above.
3. Amended plans were submitted with the appeal which show the proposed solar panel array positioned slightly lower down the southern roof slope of the building than originally submitted. The details and number of panels remain as originally submitted. While the appeal process should not be used to evolve proposals, the change does not fundamentally alter the proposal, and the Council and third parties have had the opportunity to comment upon the appeal submission. Having applied the principles in *Holborn Studios Ltd v The Council of the London Borough of Hackney* [2017] EWHC 2823 following on from *Wheatcroft (Bernard) Ltd v Secretary of State for the Environment* [1982] JPL 37, I conclude the development would not be so changed that to grant it would deprive those who should have been consulted on the amendments the opportunity of such consultation. Accordingly, my decision is made on the proposal as amended.
4. As the proposal relates to a listed building, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). There is no listed building consent before me, and as a consequence this appeal relates only to the planning merits of the case. I understand that an application for the proposed scheme under Ecclesiastical Exemption would be made as part of a separate process.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve the Grade II listed building, known as Church of St John the Evangelist¹ (the Church), or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Reasons

Special interest and significance

6. Built in 1842 from rock-faced stone with a slate roof behind a coped parapet and including Romanesque detailing both externally and internally, the Church has a 3-stage square tower enhanced with clocks to 3 sides and a distinctive belfry with tall, narrow openings to each side. It also has some fine stained glass windows and a semi-circular baptistry with a conical roof.
7. I find the significance of the Church for the purposes of this appeal relates to its architectural interest to which the external design and surviving fabric, all positively contribute. Special interest also stems from its historic interest as a building of longstanding and cherished community focus in the area.
8. Pertinent to the appeal, significance is also drawn, in part, from the Church's setting. Due to its elevated position above St John Street and steeply sloping land to the east, the Church serves as a prominent local focal point. Its immediate setting comprising an enclosed graveyard, has historic, functional, physical and visual links with the asset. This contemplative space allows the Church and its

¹ National Heritage List for England List Entry Number: 1067507; date of listing: 2 September 1987

status within the local area to be experienced and contributes considerably to both its significance as an asset, as well as the ability to appreciate that significance.

9. Beyond this space, the Bolton Road/A6 road junction to the south of the Church, as well as the largely surrounding 20th century residential development has meant that the relationship of the Church with its setting has altered over time. I saw that the extent of the enclosed grounds to the southern and eastern sides of the Church, together with mature trees, provides an important buffer from the busy road junction. However, its wider urban setting now makes little contribution to the significance of the Church.

Proposal and effects

10. The information submitted with the planning application shows almost all of the southern roof slope of the Church covered by 26 solar PV panels. Details of two types of panels have been provided, one from ESE solar using Jinko Tiger Neo N-type 435 watt all black module panels, and the other from JASolar using 450/455 watt all black mono panels. The appellant's 'Additional Information' note confirms JASolar panels would be installed. A mock-up image indicated in the appellant's documentation shows 26 panels positioned centrally within the roof slope between the tower and the chancel. The panels would be fixed to the existing slate roof by hooks in the rafters and cabling fed through to a battery, inverter and control panel fitted to the first floor tower wall.
11. Whilst the panels would be slim and of a similar dark colour, the solid expanse of uniform panels with an engineered and artificial appearance and slight projection would mean that they would be conspicuous against the Church's weathered natural slate roof and stone parapet. Even if the existing slate roof covering was installed in 1940, it nonetheless demonstrates the historical evolution of the building and is a natural material. The panels would appear as an overtly modern intervention and an atypical feature on an important roof slope. This would diminish the aesthetic interest of the Church.
12. The appellant has suggested that the proposal would not harm the listed building because the solar panels would not be widely visible. However, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not public views of the building can be gained.
13. I acknowledge the panels would not be visible in all views of the Church, particularly from the north and east. They would also not be readily discernible when stood close to the Church due to its relatively tall parapet and the shallow pitch of the roof. This, together with the numerous mature trees within the churchyard, means that, whilst the Church's tower is visible, there are only limited or filtered views of the main roof from many of the surrounding streets, including from the busy road junction. This is still the case during the months when leaves are not on the trees, as I observed at my November site visit.
14. Nevertheless, whilst the level of St John Street is somewhat below that of the churchyard, and in this slightly elevated position the views of the roof are not as direct as if it had been at road level, the roof remains clearly visible from this street and from several properties along it. The south-facing elevation of the Church is also plainly seen from within the southern part of the sloping church grounds. The solar panel installation would be an unduly prominent feature that would harmfully

disrupt the coherence of this elevation, from which the heritage qualities of the Church are readily appreciated.

15. Apart from the introduction of mounting hooks on rafters for the support rails for the panels, there would be no loss of historic fabric. Although there is relatively little detail before me regarding details of cable runs, I am satisfied that this could be the subject of a condition if otherwise acceptable. The proposal would be reversible, which to an extent would mitigate the degree of harm, albeit with an expected life in excess of 20 years, this is a significant period of time over which the solar panels would be readily apparent.
16. Whilst the solar array would be a substantial modern addition to an important elevation, I find the proposal would not so fundamentally alter the building that, taken overall, the ability to understand and appreciate its significance would be hugely compromised. It would nonetheless fail to preserve the Grade II listed building. This would be contrary to the requirements of section 66(1) of the Act. As a result, the proposal would harm the significance of this designated heritage asset.
17. In finding harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the magnitude of that harm should be assessed. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) requires the extent of harm to be clearly articulated. In this case, noting the reversible nature of the proposal, I find the harm to be at the low end of less than substantial. Nevertheless, this carries considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes securing the optimum viable use of the building.

Planning Balance

18. The appellant identifies that the proposal would reduce the operating costs of the Church and allow funds to be re-directed towards maintenance of the building and the delivery of community services. It is argued that the solar panels would further enhance the Church's environmental credentials as an 'Eco-Church'². The appellant estimates that the recent replacement of the Church's gas heating system with electric radiators has resulted in an 80% reduction in carbon emissions, but the costs of heating remain high. Calculations provided set out that the proposal would deliver annual savings of approximately £2,500.
19. The production of renewable energy and reduced use of electricity from the National Grid would support the Government's aspirations regarding climate change and would meet an aim set out at paragraph 167 of the Framework to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings. It would also assist the Church of England in its aim to be net zero by 2030. There would therefore be environmental public benefits to which I give moderate weight given the size of the solar installation.
20. A reduction in the energy bills for the Church could lead to additional funding being available for investment in other aspects of the maintenance necessary for the long-term conservation of the building. It would thus help secure the optimum viable use of the building and would be a heritage benefit of the proposal. This would in turn be a public benefit which would flow to the wider community and

² Silver Award from A Rocha UK, as detailed in section 5.5 of the appellants Statement of Case

attract moderate weight in favour of the appeal. There would also be short term employment opportunities during installation of the proposal.

21. I note social benefits relating to the role of this Church as a community hub and outreach facility in supporting the wellbeing of its users. Reduced energy costs would be likely to lead to additional funds being made available for improvements to community services and the provision of a well-heated, energy-efficient and flexible space for year-round use.
22. While only limited information has been provided to verify the appellant's comments that alternatives to solar panels were explored, such as heat pumps and an electric boiler system, I am mindful of the proximity of the graveyard and have no reason to doubt these were found to be unfeasible for the reasons given.
23. Together, the public benefits are significant. However, these must be weighed against the statutory presumption against harm to a designated heritage asset which attracts considerable importance and weight. Reaching a balanced decision between the protection of heritage significance and the need to move towards net zero is not straightforward and very much specific to each individual case.
24. I have found that the harm caused would be at the lower end of less than substantial. I have found significant public benefits which are outlined above. Consequently, even though the harm would attract very considerable importance and weight, the public benefits, would in my view, in this particular case and on the basis of the evidence before me, outweigh the less than substantial harm.
25. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would preserve the Grade II listed building, Church of St John the Evangelist, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. It would satisfy the requirements of the Act and would not conflict with Policies HE1, HE2, D1, D2 and D8 of the Salford Local Plan: Development Management Policies and Designations, adopted January 2023. Collectively these policies seek, amongst other things, to ensure Salford's heritage assets will be conserved and where appropriate their significance enhanced; that harm to the significance of a heritage asset should be avoided; that development protects the historic environment, local character and distinctiveness and achieves a high design quality.
26. Similarly, the proposal would not conflict with Policy JP-P2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan 2022 to 2039, adopted March 2024 which, amongst other matters, requires development affecting a heritage asset to have regard to national planning policy and ensure the significance of key elements of the historic environment are protected from harm, including places of worship. It would also accord with the provisions within the Framework which seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment.

Conditions

27. I have considered the Council's suggested conditions having regard to the advice set out in both the Framework³ and the PPG⁴ and made some amendments to the wording in the interests of clarity.

³ Paragraph 57.

⁴ Paragraphs: 007 Reference ID: 21a-007-20180615; and 017 Reference ID: 21a-017-20190723.

28. In addition to the standard condition relating to the time period for implementation it is necessary to impose conditions specifying the approved plans and the type of solar panel to which the permission relates in the interests of clarity and certainty. A pre-commencement condition requiring the details of associated works and fixtures to be agreed is necessary at an early stage to ensure there is no harm to the significance of the building. For the same reason, a condition requiring reinstatement of the roof to its pre-development condition in the event the panels are removed is necessary.

Conclusion

29. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Ann Veevers

INSPECTOR