



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 June 2026

by M J Francis BA (Hons) MA MSc MCIfA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th July 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/U2750/W/25/3370776

Trinity Methodist Church, Trinity Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG2 9AU

- 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 Mr G Runcorn of Trinity Methodist Church against the decision of North Yorkshire Council.
 - The application Ref is ZC24/02235/FUL.
 - The development proposed is installation of solar panels to existing roof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. A document titled 'Trinity Methodist Church – A community Church in Central Harrogate' was submitted with the appeal. It provides further details of the activities carried out in the building. This would have been seen by the Council, therefore, by accepting it, and applying the principles established by 'Holborn'¹, the Authority has not been prejudiced. Consequently, I have determined the appeal on the basis of this document, as well as the plans and information submitted with the application.
3. The proposal relates to development affecting a listed building within a conservation area. There is no listed building application before me, as the works to the building are subject to ecclesiastical exemption². However, I am required by sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building and its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses; and paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are whether the proposal would:
 - preserve the Grade II listed building, known as Trinity Methodist Church³, or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses; and

¹ Holborn Studios Ltd v The Council of the London Borough of Hackney [2017] EWHC 2823 (Admin)

² The Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (England) Order 2010

³ List entry number: 1149439

- preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Harrogate Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

Special interest and significance

5. Trinity Methodist Church is sited on a discrete, roughly triangular area of land, surrounded by wide residential roads. The streetscape with mature trees, combined with the adjoining parkland, creates a verdant setting for this imposing and attractive stone building. Built c.1879, its special interest and significance, in relation to this appeal, derive from its architectural and historic interest. Commissioned by local people, and facing the Harrogate Stray, the church was intended to be an impressive building close to major hotels and the spa. George Woodhouse, a leading church architect of the day, was commissioned to design it, the result being a cruciform shaped Gothic style building for a congregation of 700. The large tower, with spire, was added in 1880.
6. The church is within the CA⁴ which covers an extensive area of the centre of Harrogate. Whilst wells were discovered in the town in the late 16th century, it was the latter part of the 17th century when the first public bathing house was constructed, and the first major hotel opened to service visitors to Harrogate. However, much of the town did not develop until the middle of the 19th century. The special interest and significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to this appeal, is that the church is in an area of the town that developed in this period between 1850 and 1900, providing a centre of worship for both locals and visitors to the spa. Additionally, because of its size and the prominence of its spire, it is a key feature overlooking the Stray, which covers 200 acres and provides a green open space with public access.
7. Major renovations to the building were undertaken in 2010-2011 including removing the pews and creating meeting rooms. Other works included windows being double glazed and the installation of under floor heating and an air source heat pump.

Effect of works on the listed building

8. The proposed panels would be located on part of the south-east roofscape of the church, with a smaller array behind the transept roof. The larger array would extend from the apex to just above eaves level and cover a sizeable part of the roof slope. The smaller array would cover most of the roof on which the panels would be sited.
9. The steeply built, uncluttered, slate roofscapes are a key feature of the building and contribute to its architectural significance. Because of the church being sited on an 'isolated' site with space around it, it can be appreciated through 360 degrees and the building, and its roofs are visible throughout the year. Therefore, the large number of panels set against the natural slate of the roof, despite the height of the fixings, would stand out, resulting in a highly incongruent feature that would not blend in with the traditional materials used on the church.

⁴ Harrogate Conservation Character Appraisal 2010

10. A report⁵ states that the existing roof structure has not been surveyed because of its height and a plastered ceiling. Therefore, there is only limited substantive evidence of the effect that screw fixings, and indeed the numbers of solar panels would have on the timber roof structure and the ceilings beneath. Moreover, the installation of solar panels could result in the damage or loss of slates. I have no information before me as to how this would be addressed, as any new slates, unless from the same source and with the patina of the existing, would appear visually disruptive.
11. Additionally, the report states that cables will run inside the building from the solar panels to a plant room, with battery storage on a balcony and cables chased into walls. Whilst these internal works would be considered as part of the ecclesiastical exemption, I have insufficient information before me as to the effect of the proposal on the features of the designated heritage asset and whether these would be preserved.
12. I saw that the panels would not be visible from all viewpoints, including at the front of the building when approaching the church from the north-west along Trinity Road. However, when travelling along this road from the south-east, the main array would be clearly seen. Furthermore, despite any changes to the church hall and cottage towards the rear, the dominant views when approaching the site from Park Drive, are of the church and its tower. Therefore, the installation of panels on the roofscape would appear conspicuous when seen from this direction. Consequently, despite the appellant seeking to install the panels in a less prominent location, they would affect key views of the building.
13. As a result, the proposal would appear discordant and unsympathetic to the building and its architectural features and would harm the appreciation of this heritage asset.
14. Given the above, I find that the proposed works would fail to preserve the listed building and its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. This would harm the significance of the heritage asset, to which I must give considerable importance and weight.

Effect on the CA

15. Whilst occupying only a small part of the CA, the church has been identified as a key landmark building because of its siting and visibility. Having been built at the height of the 19th century expansion of Harrogate and closely related to its development as a spa town and visitor attraction, it is an important building within the CA. Therefore, the proposal to attach solar panels on a prominent roofscape of the building would lead to some harm to the CA through the visual effect of the installation deviating from the existing use of traditional materials and the erosion of historic and architectural detail. As a result, the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA.

Other Matters

16. The report includes several photographs of solar arrays on ecclesiastical buildings, but I have no information on the circumstances of these cases, including whether

⁵ Trinity Methodist Church – proposed solar panel report, Struct-Sure Limited, 18 December 2024

they are on listed buildings or in conservation areas, like the appeal site. Therefore, they provide limited support in the determination of the appeal.

Public Benefits and Balance

17. Paragraph 212 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 213 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets, or from development within its setting, and that any such harm should have clear and convincing justification. I find the harm to the listed building to be less than substantial and moderate in scale, and the harm to the CA, whilst also less than substantial, to be limited in scale. Nevertheless, these harms to the significance of the designated heritage assets are of considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of these appeals.
18. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, paragraph 215 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
19. The appellant is seeking to ensure the future viability of the building and protect the heritage asset. They have set out⁶ that the church is a hub for Harrogate wide events and provides activities focused on the elderly, young children, a homeless project, local food banks, mental health support and wellbeing sessions for families, as well as arts and musical activities. In their statement the appellant has provided details of the number of users and days and times of the week that the building is open.
20. The appellant states that the installation of the solar panels would save the church c.£3,500 per annum based on an energy audit⁷. In addition, the appellant contends that by saving this amount, it would enable them to stabilise church finances, guard against any future energy rises and keep the rentals for community groups low. It would also enable them to provide a year's free use of the building by registered charities to start, or expand, their activities in Harrogate.
21. However, the proposed savings are not supported by any substantiated evidence. I have no details of the current or projected energy costs for running the building, what proportion of the overall energy of the building would be provided by solar panels, and what level of savings would result from this investment. Moreover, there are no details of the costs of installing the solar panels.
22. I give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions, as set out in paragraph 167 of the Framework. I give moderate weight to the benefits of the building being frequently used and an important facility for local charities and groups. However, I have limited substantive evidence before me of the overall financial benefits that would result from installing solar panels. Therefore, I consider that the benefits are limited in scale and are not sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified in this instance.
23. Given the above and in the absence of public benefits that would outweigh the harm that would be caused, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to

⁶ Harrogate Conservation Character Appraisal 2010

⁷ D3Associates (Energy and Architecture) February 2024

preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II listed building and that the character or appearance of the CA would be neither conserved nor enhanced.

24. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and paragraph 212 of the Framework. It would conflict with Policies HP2 and HP3 of the Harrogate District Local Plan 2014-2035, 2020, which together and in part, requires development affecting heritage assets to be determined in accordance with national planning policy and to protect and reinforce the characteristics of the area.

Conclusion

25. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

M J Francis

INSPECTOR