

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Repair and maintenance
Name of project/group:	St. Paul's Church aka The Sanctuary
Location:	St. John's Hill, London. SW11 (London Borough Wandsworth)
Duration (if applicable):	Two years

Short description of project:

The former St Paul's Church is a locally-listed building occupying a prominent position within the St John's Hill Conservation Area, London Borough of Wandsworth. Following the demise of its original use, the building became a low key community use and suffered from neglect and disrepair due to zero investment. The original church fabric remained wholly intact but ragstone walling was in deterioration, the stone spire required urgent structural attention and the roof and leaded stained glass windows were failing.

The objective of the development was to create an opportunity for private investment that enabled holistic renovation by seeking a new value-generating change of use. Accordingly, a development team was assembled by South London Land / James Laurence Group in 2010 and included Boon Brown Architects, City Planning and Turley Heritage to convert the building into community use and residential accommodation.

The resulting sensitive design is a great example of a private developer - The James Laurence Group and their consultant team engaging closely with Wandsworth Council Conservation Officers to create a sympathetic refurbishment and change of use. The complete external stone fabric has been restored, new supporting structure has been integrated into the spire, leaded windows are refurbished and replaced and the internal sub-division carefully responds to heritage features.

What would have happened without this project/group?:

Prior to its conversion, the building was only partly occupied and redundant as a place of worship. The resultant lack of use and investment meant that the building maintenance was neglected and in declining condition with a significant repair burden.

The prospect of a community taking on the building in its entirety, given the challenges arising from the maintenance burden was very unlikely and disrepair would have escalated. It is likely that without this project the building would have rapidly declined resulting in the damage and loss of important fabric. Left unchecked, the building could have easily resulted in a scenario where the building reached a point where repair and re-

use would become unviable, jeopardising its long-term future.

Not only would the process of ongoing and sustained decline result in a harmful impact on the heritage significance of the former church, but it would also harmed the character or appearance of the wider St John's Conservation Area and the special interest of the nearby listed buildings.

Introducing private investment to the repair of heritage assets is understood to be a delicate balance of capital gain over sympathetic development and this project demonstrates how a clear and open relationship with all key stakeholders can deliver a successful project.



St Paul's Church (Photo: Boon Brown Architects).

How did the project achieve its objectives?

The design of the conversion was informed by a thorough understanding of the particular heritage significance of the locally-listed building and its contribution to the character or appearance of the St John's Hill Conservation Area. This collaborative process between designer and team allowed key opportunities and constraints to be identified at an early stage.

The proposed designs therefore incorporated internal features of value, despite the lack of any statutory or planning policy requirement to do so and secured a range of sensitive interventions, including a new dwelling house within the setting of the church that replaced a ruinous, former church hall.

Working closely with the Local Authority, the proposals were refined to ensure that the

particular heritage significance of the church was retained whilst securing a sustainable new use; thereby ensuring its long-term conservation and future.

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

By securing a viable and sustainable new use for the building, its long term future is now ensured. The completed scheme retained internal features of significance within the new layout, providing a tangible connection to the church's history. The scheme also ensured the repair and restoration of the exterior, including the impressive stonework façade, roof and historic fenestration.

As a result, in place of a decaying and largely redundant building, the former church is once again a striking local landmark in good condition with an active and vibrant mix of uses.

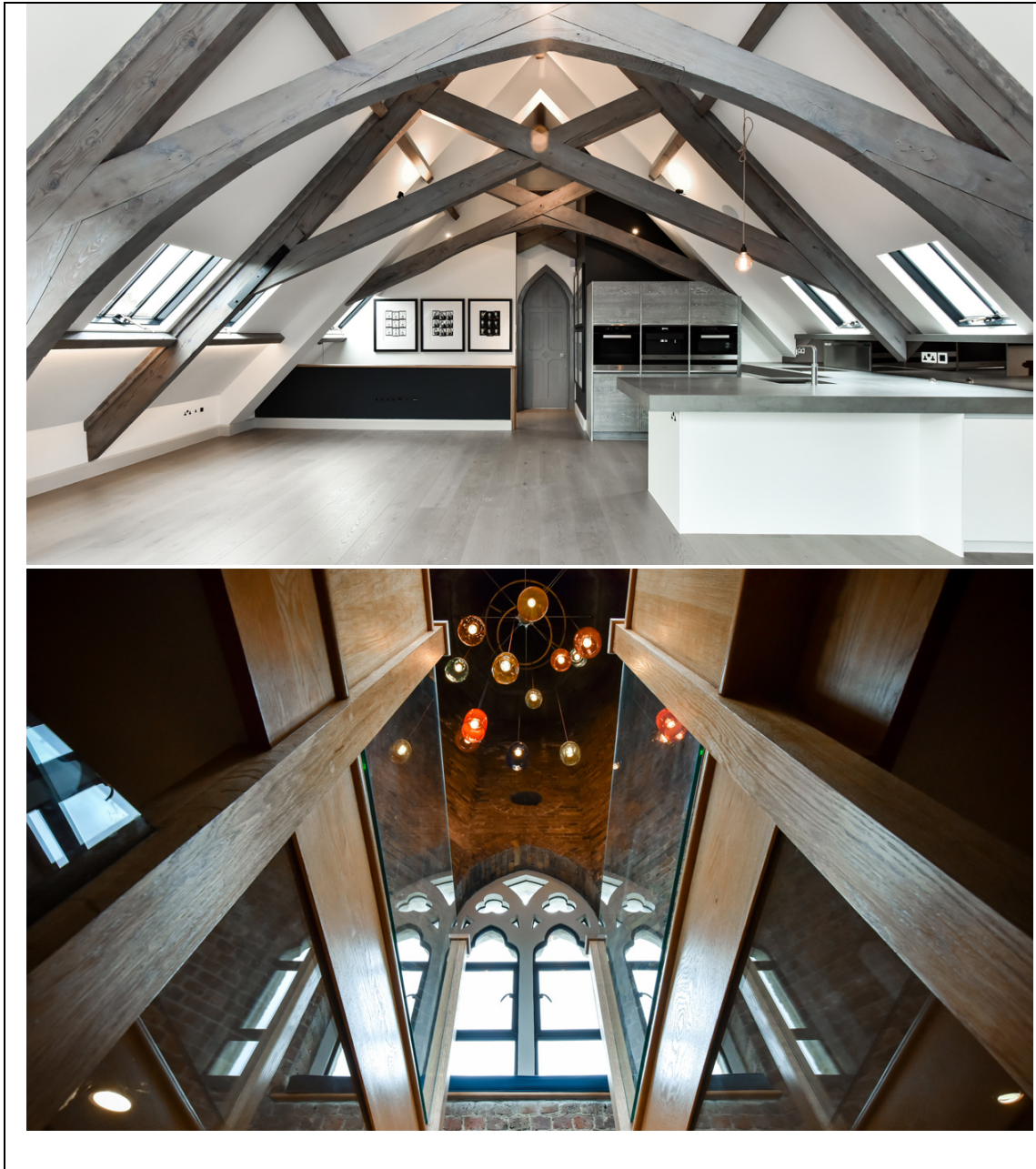
The scheme also delivered a high-quality contemporary addition to the conservation area in the form of the dwelling house, which replaced the dilapidated former church hall and enhances its character or appearance.

The following are interior images of The Sanctuary (Photos: Boon Brown Architects):









What were the main lessons learnt or challenges? Would anything be done differently?

The James Laurence Group is experienced in small complex projects similar in nature to St Pauls / Sanctuary House - they employed design consultants with similar experience, hence many of the obvious challenges were exposed early in the design process. Their approach to the project was to safeguard the original fabric as a priority and to 'softly' introduce the new accommodation into the building such that form and fenestration patterns were respected. Placing habitable rooms into a church building with windows designed for a different purpose and then satisfying ventilation and heating requirements is a great challenge that has been executed well in this instance. All too often there is a desire to maximise floor area and revenue at the detriment to the conservation aspect of the project.

Early engagement with the Planning Authority and listening/responding to their concerns has also benefited the delivery of the project.

What is the future for the case study?

The former church is now in sustainable mixed-use that will ensure its on-going maintenance and conservation.

The James Laurence Group Team is actively seeking new opportunities of a similar type as it has been a rewarding journey.

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