

Development Management
Manchester City Council
Floor 6 Town Hall Extension
Albert Square
Manchester
M60 2LA

Our Ref: EKPS/250903/EP

Submitted via the Planning Portal

21 November 2025

Dear Sir or Madam,

Application for Full Planning Permission: Change of Use Class E(d) to Use Class F.1(f), St Benedicts Church, Manchester

Planning Portal Ref: PP-14470234

On behalf of our client, Manchester Vineyard ('the Applicant'), we are pleased to enclose a full planning application for the change of use of St Benedicts Church, Bennett Street, Manchester from an indoor climbing centre (Use Class E(d)) to a place of public worship or religious instruction (Use Class F.1(f)). The application has been submitted via the Planning Portal (Ref: PP-14470234).

The Site and Surroundings

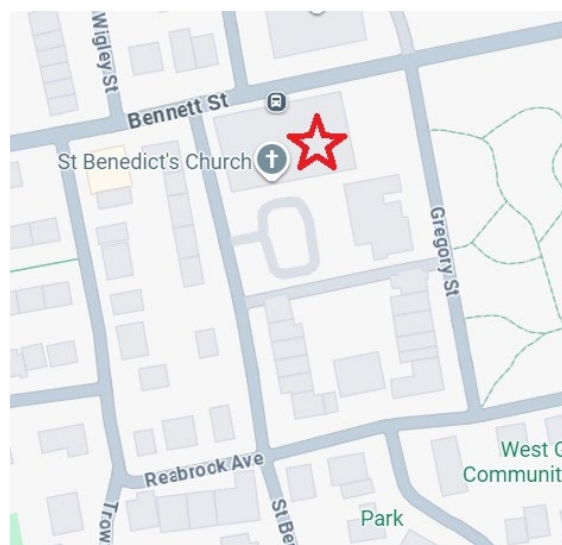
The Site is situated in the Ardwick ward of Manchester and consists of St Benedicts Church, a Grade II* listed building since 1974 (Listing number: 1207939) incorporating a tall nave with low aisle, tall north-west tower, a low 2-storey clergy house on north side with a paved car parking area to the south of the Site. It is situated on St Benedicts Avenue 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 Site location is shown in **Figures 1** and **Figure 2** (overleaf).

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 recent 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.



^ Figure 1: Site Boundary (Google Maps, 2025)



^ Figure 2: Site Location (Google Maps, 2025)

Relevant 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/N2

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 and formation of car park with 4 x 4m high security lighting columns and 2.4m high steel railings and gates. Approved - 16 April 2004

The Proposed Development

The development proposes a change of use to the vacant St Benedicts Church from Class E commercial, business and service, specifically subsection Class E (d) *“for indoor sport, recreation or fitness, not involving motorised vehicles or firearms or use as a swimming pool or skating rink, principally to visiting members of the public”* to Class F.1 learning and non-residential institutions, specifically subsection (f) *for, or in connection with, public worship or religious instruction*.

The description of development is as follows:

“Change of use from climbing centre (Class E(d)) to place of worship (Class F1(f))”

There are no physical internal or external works proposed at this time. It is likely that in due course some internal changes may be proposed but these would be subject to a Listed Building Consent when appropriate.

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 seeks to provide support to those in need via social action work within Manchester.

MV is part of a national organisation called Vineyard Churches UK & Ireland (VCUKI) and Ireland 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 that will provide long term community for those who attend but also to then go and deliver social action to those in need within that city.

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

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.

As set out above, the premises will be used for a range of meetings, training courses, support groups and church services. During services on a Sunday, it is expected that there will be use of a PA system for up to 60 minutes, along with singing and use of instruments. However, there is not expected to be any use of loud amplified music.

Relevant Policy and Legislation

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Use Class Order

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (“UCO”) and subsequent amendments, puts uses of land and buildings into various categories known as “use classes”. The categories give an indication of the types of use which may fall within each use class.

Class E Commercial, Business and Service.

“Use, or part use, for all or any of the following purposes—

(a) for the display or retail sale of goods, other than hot food, principally to visiting members of the public,

(b) for the sale of food and drink principally to visiting members of the public where consumption of that food and drink is mostly undertaken on the premises,

(c) for the provision of the following kinds of services principally to visiting members of the public—

(i) financial services,

(ii) professional services (other than health or medical services), or

(iii) any other services which it is appropriate to provide in a commercial, business or service locality,

(d) for indoor sport, recreation or fitness, not involving motorised vehicles or firearms, principally to visiting members of the public,

(e) for the provision of medical or health services, principally to visiting members of the public, except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner,

(f) for a creche, day nursery or day centre, not including a residential use, principally to visiting members of the public,

(g) for—

(i) an office to carry out any operational or administrative functions,

(ii) the research and development of products or processes, or

(iii) any industrial process.

Given the previous lawful use of the building fell within Use **Class E Commercial, Business and Service** (as approved under Application 070150/FO/2003/N2), it can be concluded that the extant use of the property falls within Use Class E, specifically subsection (d).

Class F.1 Learning and non-residential institutions

The proposal for the church building to revert to its original use, consistent with its function prior to closure in 2002, is considered to fall within Use Class F.1, specifically subsection (f).

“Any use not including residential use—

(a) for the provision of education,

(b) for the display of works of art (otherwise than for sale or hire),

(c) as a museum,

(d) as a public library or public reading room,

(e) as a public hall or exhibition hall,

(f) for, or in connection with, public worship or religious instruction,

(g) as a law court”

Planning Policy

All planning applications must be determined in accordance with the relevant development plan policies and guidance as stated in Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan for Manchester City Council consists of the following:

- Manchester Core Strategy (“MCS”), adopted July 2012;
- Retained Policies of the Unitary Development Plan (“UDP”) adopted 1995, and;

- Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, adopted March 2024.

The Manchester Core Strategy (hereafter “MCS”) is the key document and sets out the long-term strategic planning policies for Manchester's future development whereas, the UDP assists the MCS with several retained policies. Furthermore, the Places for Everyone (“PfE”) Joint Development Plan Document sets out the strategic development goals for the region including economic development and sustainable place-making.

The Site is within Central Manchester as defined in Policy EC8 of the Manchester Core Strategy (MCS), and also within an Inner Area (Policy SP1). There are no relevant site-specific allocations.

The pertinent policies are as follows:

MCS:

- **Policy EC 8: Central Manchester** – promotes development which has regard to ensuring employment within Central Manchester complements those uses within the City Centre.
- **EN3: Heritage** – requires new development to be designed so as to support the Council in preserving or, where possible, enhancing the historic environment, the character, setting and accessibility of areas and buildings of acknowledged importance, including listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, conservation areas and archaeological remains.
- **Policy DM1: Development Management** – requires all developments to have regard to a range of specific issues including: impact on the surrounding area in terms of design, scale and appearance; effects on amenity such as privacy, light, noise, odours, litter, road safety and traffic generation; accessibility (for disabled people and sustainable transport modes); community safety and crime prevention; refuse storage and collection; vehicular access; and green infrastructure.

‘Saved’ policies of the UDP:

- **Policy DC26: Development and Noise** – aims to reduce the impact of noise on people living and working in, or visiting, the City by considering both:
 - a) The effect of new development proposals which are likely to be generators of noise; and
 - b) The implications of new development being exposed to existing noise sources which are effectively outside planning control.

The Policy adds that where the Council believes that a new proposal might generate potentially unacceptable levels of noise, it will require the applicant to provide an assessment of the likely impact and of the measures proposed to deal with it satisfactorily. It goes on to state that the Council will control noise levels by requiring, where necessary, high levels of noise insulation in new development as well as noise barriers where this is appropriate.

PfE:

- **Policy JP-Strat1** - outlines the overarching strategic approach for development within the area, aiming to deliver sustainable growth by focusing on well-connected, inclusive, and economically resilient places.
- **Policy JP-P2 (Heritage)** - focuses specifically on conserving and enhancing heritage assets. It requires new developments to respect and integrate heritage features, protecting cultural and historic identity while supporting viable uses that sustain their long-term preservation.

- **Policy JP-P1: Sustainable Places / Sustainable Design** - emphasises the creation of high-quality, well-designed places that are environmentally sustainable, inclusive, and adaptable to climate change. It promotes energy efficiency, active travel, green infrastructure, and locally distinctive design.

Other Material Policy Considerations

In line with Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, relevant material considerations include (but are not limited to):

- The Guide to Development in Manchester SPD, adopted April 2007;
- National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”), updated December 2024;
- Planning Policy Guidance (“PPG”) updated December 2024.

Planning Appraisal

Having introduced the Applicant, the site and surroundings, the proposed development and the relevant local and national planning policies, it is now relevant to present the justification for the proposals.

The main issues for consideration relate to the acceptability of the proposals in terms of the acceptability of the extended operating hours and associated impact on amenity, alongside heritage considerations.

Principle of Development

The proposed change of use from the previous Climbing Centre (Class E(d) use) to a Place of Worship (Class F1(f) of St Benedict’s Church will align with both Policy EC8 East Manchester, Policy SP1 and PfE Policy JP-Strat1 in that it will bring a currently vacant building back into a productive use, providing a community facility for residents which will also support the employment of up to 6 people.

Amenity Considerations

Highways and Parking

The application is supported by a Transport Statement prepared by Rappor which includes an assessment of the existing transport conditions, accessibility, relevant planning policy, and the potential traffic impact, including parking demand, associated with the proposed change of use. The Statement identifies the following:

- The site is located in a sustainable area of Gorton, within a short walking distance of local bus services on Bennett Street and Hyde Road and rail via Ashburys Station.
- The local highway network operates effectively, with low accident rates and no identified safety concerns.
- The proposed on-site car park (44 spaces) and overspill car park (20 spaces) provides sufficient parking capacity for the sites parking demands during a full capacity event. Further, cycle parking is provided within the church building.
- The predicted traffic generation from the development is minimal, equating to fewer than 6 vehicle movements in the peak network hours and 12 vehicle movements in the development peak hour (12:00 – 13:00). This level of activity will have a negligible effect on the operational capacity of the surrounding road network.

- The Net two-way trips during the weekend peak are anticipated to be -30, with net negative trips anticipated overall when compared to the existing use.
- The proposals are fully consistent with national and local transport policy objectives, including the National Planning Policy Framework and the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy, which encourage developments that reduce car dependency and support walking, cycling, and public transport use.

It is concluded that the proposed change of use can be safely and efficiently accommodated within the existing transport network without detriment to highway capacity or safety.

Noise

As set out above, there is not expected to be any significant noise generating activities taking place within the premises and limited use of a PA system during services on a Sunday. Given the nature of the building, which is a solid-brick church with thick masonry walls and minimal external openings it is not expected that the proposed use will have a negative impact on the surrounding residential properties.

It is not considered that the use of the property will not cause any adverse impact on the surrounding amenity, and as a result, the development accords with Core Strategy Policy DM1 and Saved Unitary Development Plan Policy DC26.

Heritage Considerations

As previously stated, the church building itself is Grade II* listed. This application relates to the change of use of the building only and there are no internal or external alterations proposed and there will therefore be no impact on the architectural and protected features of the building.

The proposed change of use however, will realign the use of the building to its original purpose, as identified within the listing description of the building, in that it will be occupied by Manchester Vineyard who are an evangelical church that provides community for those who attend.

The proposals therefore align with Core Strategy Policy EM1 and PfE Policy JP-P2 in that they will 'protect' and 'enhance' a Grade II* listed building through reinstating its original purpose as a church.

Supporting Plans and Documents

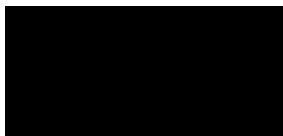
In addition to this covering letter, the planning application is supported by the following plans and documents:

- Planning Application Forms and Certificates;
- Site Location Plan;
- Transport Statement prepared by Rappor;
- Waste Management Details, including completed Waste Proforma.

We would be grateful if you could confirm receipt of this planning application and confirm that it has been successfully validated.

I trust the submitted information is sufficient, however should you have any questions or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone (07500 104178).

Yours faithfully,



Ellie Philcox
Director

