

St Silas Church & Housing, Byker.

St Silas Church, which is Grade II Listed, was built in the heart of the shipbuilding community of Byker on the corner of Clifford Street and Burton Street in 1885/1886 to serve a Parish of 15,000 souls. By 2002 the Parish had declined to 4,500 souls and the congregation to about 25. The terraced streets which once surrounded the Church had been demolished; a new elevated section of the Metro railway and the Shields Road by-pass separated the Church from the new community in the Byker Wall.

The Church's future looked unsustainable when the Parish and Byker Bridge Housing Association (BBHA) decided to collaborate to develop a brief for the Parish's Architect Anthony Keith Architects. The Church's objectives were to increase involvement with the surrounding community, make the most of its resources to cut its running costs and create an income for it. BBHA needed new head offices and land for housing.

They decided to lease a third of the Church to Byker Bridge Housing Association for their head offices. They wanted to create a new Worship area and a Church Hall with new kitchen and toilets. The old Church Hall, which was a late addition to the Church, would be demolished to restore the original concept and allow the land between the Church and the Metro line to be redeveloped as housing for single homeless people. The existing High Altar was to be removed and the floor level of the Nave maintained right through, to provide a less hierarchical and more flexible Worship space and a level approach for people with disabilities. New heating and lighting was required together with a PA and induction loop system.



View to the West end of the Church showing the new full height glazed screen and new kitchen and toilet accommodation.

Inside the Church a mezzanine floor was inserted in the North Aisle to double the floor area available to BBHA. This had to be designed to be reversible with minimum impact on the existing structure. The timber coffered ceiling was left exposed as a feature in the offices. The new partition wall between the Church and the new offices includes arched fire resisting windows to remind everyone using the building that it is still a place of Worship.

The division between the new Church Hall and the new Worship area is frameless glass to maintain the overall impression of the Nave as one space. The new kitchens and toilets inserted

at the West end are as simple as possible so that they do not distract from the splendour of the Nave or attempt to imitate it.

Before construction started on the housing a study was undertaken of the noise and vibration levels in the area and a specification developed from it to achieve a noise reduction greater than the standards required in the Building Regulations.



View of the new courtyard to the south of the Church.

The housing scheme which is made up of 19 bedsits and a Wardens bungalow turns its back on the noisy railway and the road and is arranged around a courtyard looking towards the Church. It is at its highest closest to the Metro on the South East side and is at its lowest on the West to allow the maximum amount of sunlight into the courtyard. It also acts as a sound barrier to reduce the noise disturbance in the Church from the by-pass and railway, services can now be held undisturbed by passing trains.

This scheme won the Lord Mayors Design Award for Refurbishment & Conservation in 2005, and the RICS Renaissance Award for Community Benefit in 2006. The scheme was also short listed for the National RICS awards in 2006 and received a Special Mention award at the RIBA Hadrian Awards in 2007.

The housing has proved very successful particularly with the residents, some stating that the housing and community have changed their lives. The Church has also seen an increase in the congregation and a welcome return of weddings and christenings being held at the Church. The new Church hall is also proving very popular and is usually fully booked providing an income for the Church.



19 Lansdowne Terrace, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 1HP
T: 0191 213 0133 F: 0191 213 5050 E: mail@akarchitects.net W: www.akarchitects.net



Contractor: Dorin Construction
Hadrian House, Beaminster Way East,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 2ER
T: 0191 214 0360 F: 0191 214 0578



Services Engineers: J Humphrey & Partners
Prosperous House, Ecclestone Close,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE27 0RX
T: 0191 268 1332 F: 0191 268 5851



Quantity Surveyor: Todd Milburn Partnership
150 New Bridge Street,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 2TE
T: 0191 230 2100 F: 0191 230 2101