

**Proposed New Patio Window Opening to the Former Westruther Parish Church, Westruther, TD3 6NS, Scottish Borders for Mr. & Mrs. G. Wright.**  
**Design justification for the formation of new patio doors in the south elevation.**

**Introduction.**

Mr. & Mrs Wright acquired the former church building in the summer of 2022 with the intention of carrying out a residential conversion. A Planning application was submitted in September 2022 and was granted on 3rd February 2023, reference 22/01508/FUL. A Building Warrant was applied for and granted on 10th May 2023 reference 23/00118/CONALT, with works commencing immediately.

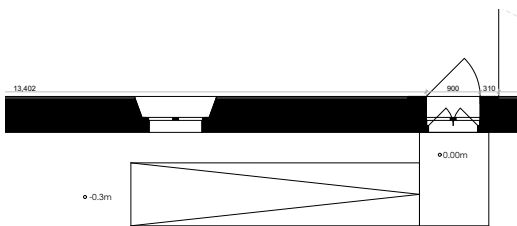
The original submission to Borders Council Planning in the planning application showed the enlargement of the windows to the southern elevation, which was not deemed appropriate by the Planning Case Officer and were omitted.

**Building History.**

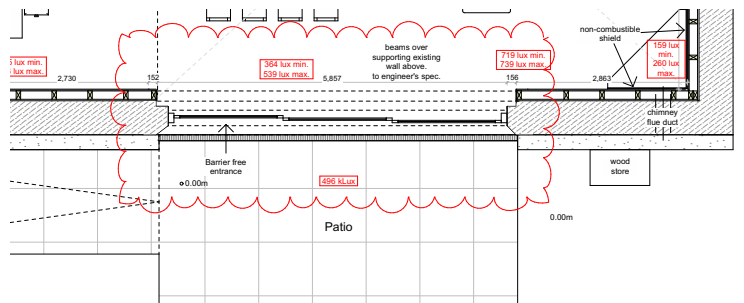
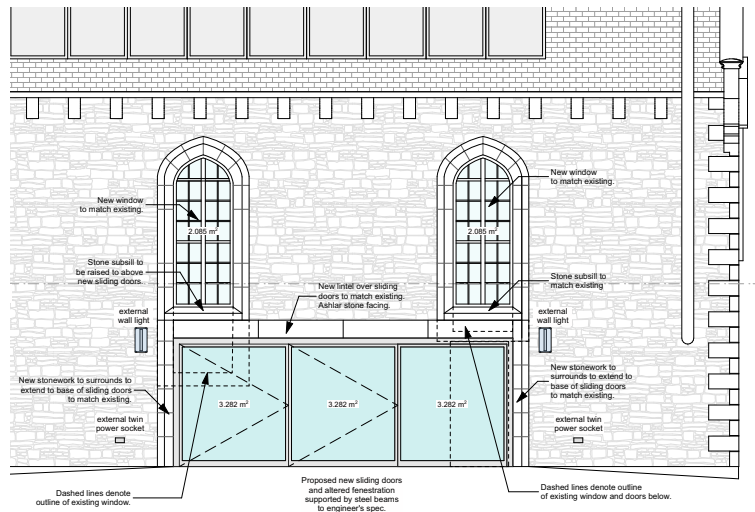
Westruther Parish Church was built in 1838 by John Smith to replace the nearby Old Kirk, which was converted into a burial vault dating to 1649. The building was subsequently altered in 1752, abandoned in 1840 and is now subject to residential conversion.

**Current Scenario.**

Mr. & Mrs. Wright commenced the building works to their property in May 2023, requiring the full strip out of the building, new floor, wall and ceiling finishes to achieve the thermal requirements of the Technical Standards. It became evident that the combination of windows to the north, south and eastern elements were insufficient to achieve lighting levels more than 739 Lux on an average day. This was exacerbated by the windows to the east being stained glass. Other than the two windows to the southern elevation, no direct natural light beyond morning periods from the east would illuminate the interior of the principle living room/kitchen. Similarly, there is no view from any part of the ground floor due to the height of the existing window cills. Mr. & Mrs. Wright considered the installation of the patio doors to be classified as “permitted development”.



2 Existing Plan & Elevation in location of Proposed alterations.



1 Proposed alterations - Plan & Elevation.

## **Building Description.**

A simple neo-Gothic rectangular form with whinstone rubble walls, dressed stone window mouldings, entrance portico and belfry at the west gable, dismantled in the 1960's for structural reasons, leaving only the corbelled base. Triple light gothic window arches at east and west gables, 4No. gothic timber framed windows to the north, reflected in the south, however, with a single upper storey window for the choir gallery. Stone parapet gables with finial at east, corbelled brackets at the eaves and dressed sandstone quoins to each corner sitting on a bevelled dressed stone plinth. Slated roof with no guttering and dressed stone eaves on corbels. The arts and crafts stained windows date from 1896, 1900 and a modern replacement of 1966. A simple bell and bracket arrangement with chain-pull has been fixed at high level to the extreme west of the south facing gable. The building is not listed.

The ground floor has an entrance lobby, vestry with fireplace and recessed storage cupboard, under stair storage/meter cupboard, main hall (pews removed), stone stairs and door to the mezzanine choir gallery, with tiered flooring (pews removed) and fixed organ. A lobby to the main church hall has been added. The building has been stripped of all ecclesiastical features and is left with a dado timber panelled wall, plaster finished above, expressed truss soffit and coomed timber ceiling. A curved haunched soffit to the choir gallery, with panelled timber balustrade, exposed suspended timber floor with stone covered heating trench. A single, high level carved marble memorial plaque exists on the south internal wall adjacent to the mezzanine. There are no water services, or foul/surface water drainage facilities within the building; only electricity.

Externally, the building is contained within a coped whinstone wall, 600mm low level to the north and west and approximately 1,800mm to the east and south. It has double wrought iron (modern replacement) gates, with substantial stone gateposts to the west. Within the grounds there is a carved Celtic cross on a stepped plinth war memorial. To the south and east perimeter boundaries there are established trees, with a yew tree to the south west corner, all in various conditions of health. A section of wall to the south west corner has bowed due to root undermining and requires to be rebuilt. The ground to the north and west is grass covered and well maintained, however, to the east and south, the grounds are overgrown. A layby in the road to the west provides an unofficial parking place for the church.

## **Location.**

Westruther is situated on the B6465, 5 miles from the village of Lauder within the Lammermuir Hills, with access to the A68 trunk road between Edinburgh and Melrose.

## **Reasons for the Patio Door Installation.**

A return to church/community use was highly unlikely, given that the previous diminished congregation had vacated and merged with another in the vicinity. The applicant purchased the church from the Church of Scotland with a view to carrying out a residential change of use, to install a water supply, foul drainage, create bedrooms, bathrooms and a kitchen and living room. One of the ground floor bedrooms to be specifically for the use of a disabled person and to have a wet-room with appropriate activity spaces.

Without the patio doors, the large living room was seen as being very dark. This was a consequence of having a total window opening area of 31.6 sqm and a floor area of 179 sqm of which three sections of window (on the eastern gable) were stained glass, further reducing the extent of natural light into the building.

Note a handheld digital light meter was used to detect the existing Lux levels in different positions, of which the maximum and minimum values have been noted on the Proposed plan in red. The device used was the *URCERI MT-912 Light Meter*, which has the following specification:

1. Illuminance measuring range: 0~200kLux, 0~20kFc
2. Resolution: <1000:0.1; > 1000:1
3. Accuracy:  $\pm 3\%$  rdg  $\pm 8$ dgts (<10,000Lux),  $\pm 4\%$  rdg  $\pm 10$ dgts (>10,000Lux)

4. Temperature measuring range: -20°C ~ 70°C / -4°F ~ 158°F
5. Temperature measuring accuracy: ±1.5°C/2.7°C
6. Spectral response: CIE photopic (CIE human eye response curve)
7. Spectral accuracy: CIE V(λ) function (f1' ≤ 6%, f2' ≤ 2%)
8. Sampling rate: 2 times per second
9. Photo detector: Silicon photo-diode with spectral response filter.
10. Power supply: 3 x 1.5V AAA batteries
11. Battery life: At least 60 hours
12. Dimensions (L\*W\*H): 174.5\*56\*30.5mm

Further details can be made available upon request.

Due to the high cill height of the windows the visual connection between the private amenity space to the southern yard space was none-existent, whilst the physical link was limited to an existing door to the private south facing yard space. This prevented any visual amenity from anywhere within the building to the surrounding garden space. Such an arrangement would therefore work both ways and would reduce the active benefits of using this space. From a security point of view, the lack of connection to the side garden space allowed an unsupervised space, which could give rise to unauthorised access and undetected attendance.

### **Design Philosophy.**

Whilst not a listed building, or in a conservation area, a similar conservation-led approach was taken to preserve and enhance the character and setting of a socially, culturally, architecturally and historically significant building. On this basis, the impact of the installation of the patio doors was assessed against the significance to the building as a whole.

Areas of external significance: all aspects of the public elevations to the north and west were deemed to be of architectural significance, with two modern interventions to the south elevation of a repositioned bell housing and an emergency escape door.

### **Elements of Significance.**

The justification of an intervention upon a listed building is generally assessed by its significance upon the building, or the impact upon the significance of the building in the first place. Westruther church is not listed, is not within a conservation area, however, the analysis process has been followed accordingly.

The building has an important presence to the streetscape within Westruther, where the north and west elevations are prominent to the village. To the south, the view is restricted to a single oblique view from the north gable of No.1 Houndslaw Road and No.3 Kirkpark. This elevation has 4No. vertical simple two radii arched windows, with a smaller arched window at high level to the choir balcony.

### **Assessment of Significance Criteria.**

The Burra Charter provides the following definition of cultural significance: Cultural Significance means aesthetic, historical, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects.

The following assessment of the heritage value of the former Westruther Church is based on an analysis of the historical development of the village and building, including tangible documentary and physical evidence, as well as intangible historical and social associations.

In order to establish parameters for an appropriate future use, and the extent and design of any future works to Westruther Church, it is necessary to list and define the heritage value of the elements of the building. This list forms the basis for policies which should be met in order to ensure appropriate conservation of the buildings and their landscape context.

An assessment of the significance of various elements should also help a designer to make the best of the architectural qualities in the buildings.

Grading of the individual elements of the site is based on the contribution each element makes to

each component of significance, (i.e. historic, archaeological, architectural and aesthetic, landscape, social and spiritual and ecological) whether it be at a local (within Westruther), regional (the Borders Region), national (Scotland) or international level.

The elements of the building and site are graded according to the following criteria:

- **Elements of Considerable Significance**

A building or element of importance within Scotland, or a good example of a particular period, style or type with a high degree of intact original fabric that contributes substantially to the importance of the building or site overall.

- **Elements of Moderate Significance**

A building or element of local, within Westruther/Borders, importance, or an element that contributes to, but is not a key element to the importance of the building or site overall.

- **Neutral Elements of Significance**

An element which neither contributes, nor detracts from the importance of the building or area overall.

- **Negative or Intrusive Elements**

A building or element which detracts from the overall significance of the building or site overall. The following definitions as used for the assessment of significance have been extracted and modified from the Burra Charter Guidelines – Cultural Significance and other sources

- **Social Significance**

Social value represents the strong or special association of the site with a recognisable community or cultural group for social, spiritual or cultural reasons.

- **Architectural and Aesthetic Significance**

The importance of the structure in terms of its contribution to an understanding of the architectural development of the site and in a broader architectural context locally, regionally or nationally. Aesthetic value includes aspects of sensory perception such as consideration of the form, scale, colour, texture and material of the fabric; the smells and sounds associated with the character of the place and its use.

- **Archaeological Significance**

The potential for the site to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural and natural history. The archaeological research value of a site will depend on the importance of the data involved, on its rarity, quality or representative nature, and on the degree to which the site may contribute further substantial information.

- **Ecological Significance**

This encompasses the various aspects of ecological importance within the site, including rarity and any special features, representative value, diversity and pattern, integrity, size and viability of an ecosystem.

### **Architectural Significant Plans and Elevations**

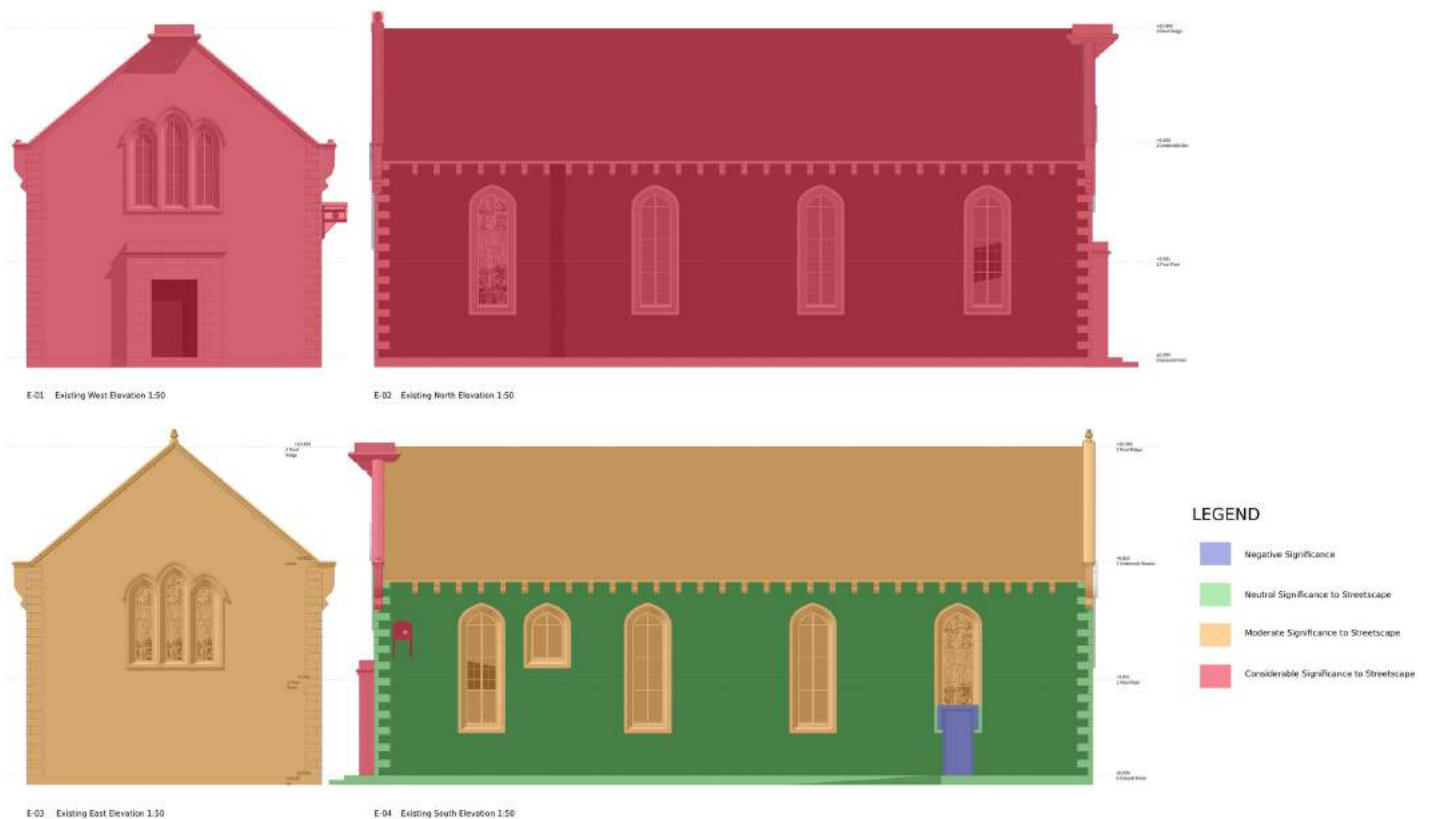
The following floor plans and elevations highlight the areas within the property that are deemed to be architecturally significant.

Westruther Church contributes to the significance of the village through its character, massing and scale, with principal elevations facing north and west as the building sits on the corner of two road intersections. Views to the eastern elevation are restricted due to the proximity to the site boundary and presence of mature trees, whilst views to the southern elevation are limited to the two properties forming a boundary to the application site. Little has changed to the principle elevation other than repair, re-painting and the removal of a boiler house and flue. Little physical

change has been carried out within the interior of the building, other than the creation of a lobby to the main church hall.

It can be concluded that the significant elevations to the north and west are significant to the village-scape of Westruther and remain unaffected by the works. The less significant elevation to the east is unaffected, whilst the least significant elevation in terms of views onto and from, have the low level intervention of the patio doors.

Mitigation of the intervention to the southern elevation involves the continuation of the ashlar stone jamb mouldings and installation of the stone lintel above the patios. This represents a modern intervention which enables a connection between the living room and the rear patio space.



*3 Levels of Significance of the Existing Elevations.*

### **Cultural Significance.**

The proposed patios doors do not impact the cultural significance of the building.

### **Social Significance.**

The proposed patio doors do not impact the social significance of the building.

### **Ecological Significance.**

The proposed patio doors do not impact the ecological significance of the building.

### **Architectural Significance.**

The southern elevation is considered to be of significance, however, of moderate significance in terms of its architectural value and of low significance to the streetscape of Westruther. The proposed intervention to the southern elevation are neutralised by the continuation of the ashlar moulded jambs and the ashlar stone lintel.

**Archaeological Significance.**

No reported finds within the study area are known about and is out with the scope of this study.

**Environmental Significance.**

No reported finds within the study area are known about and is out with the scope of this study.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

There is no doubt or debate that the former Westruther Church is a combination of considerable/modest architectural, historic, cultural, ecclesiastical and social significance, merit of retention.

However, it could be argued that as a result of the redundancy and change of use, there were inevitable interventions to make the building work in its new role as a family home.

The following Key Features in particular should be protected, respected and retained, in line with Conservation Good Practice.

- The overall significant areas of building composition should not be detracted from.
- Roof, gable and principle elevational compositions.
- Main entrance doors.
- Stained glass windows.
- Bell bracket.
- Other miscellaneous elements of historical interest.

Features that are considered of less importance, to be upgraded, or to receive interventions:

- Internal walls.
- Extension of mezzanine floor.
- Suspended modern light fittings.
- Modern sanitary fittings.
- Modern kitchen fittings.
- Increased daylighting to principle room

**The Design.**

The client brief was to create a 5No. bedroom family dwelling, all with en-suite facilities, storage, heating, kitchen, dining and living room areas. Part of the brief was to create a fully accessible bedroom and wet room to enable independent living for a disabled person. One factor that required consideration was the treatment of the emergency escape door and to explore the possibility of opening up more window area in the private, south facing elevation to bring more daylight into the double storey void and enable easier access to a private garden area.

**Elevational Intervention.**

Options to lower the sills to the narrow arched windows within the south facing elevation of the living room area were considered. This had previously been carried out with an unsympathetic emergency escape door linked to an external steel ramp, resulting in the removal of the dressed stone sill to the window.

A different solution to remove any impression other than the new opening was pursued. An unashamed modern intervention, removing the whinstone section between two arches, creates a balanced glazed opening, symmetrical with the order of windows. Careful dressing of the stone mouldings to the windows at the intersection of the new opening and the original was an important consideration to create a detail to confirm the quality of the intervention.

All existing stained-glass windows to be repaired/preserved, with panel above existing main hall escape door to be relocated internally and back lit above the new feature patio doors. Replacement of this window to match the non-stained-glass windows within the building.

### **Contextual Relationship.**

Aspect from the proposed patio to the boundary is restricted by an existing stone wall. Beyond the wall is a LPG gas tank to which the neighbour has created a fence and planting screen from his property to this installation. There is therefore no overlooking from the patio to the neighbour's garden due to the existing screening. A further fence is proposed to raise the boundary screen to 1.8m through a timber boarded fence within the applicant's property to reinforce the screening.



*4 Obstructed views from left-, centre- and right-hand sides of the proposed sliding door position.*

### **Conclusion.**

The proposal to convert the former church into a residential property will ensure the future of the building. Whilst a modest building in style, it provides a valuable and significant architectural and streetscape contribution to the village of Westruther. Interventions have been confined to the rebuilding of a damaged wall to create a driveway and a private garden enclosure, with an opening in the southern elevation to enable more light into the proposed living room area. Solar photovoltaic panels are proposed to the south facing roof to reduce the building's carbon footprint. Internally, the volume of the former church hall has been maintained by the double storey kitchen, dining and living room space, with 5No. bedrooms, of which one would be fully disabled accessible. The thermal efficiency of the building would be significantly improved with new floor, wall and roof insulation.

The lack of a view at ground floor, the poor levels of daylighting through small aperture windows and a requirement to connect the ground floor directly to residential amenity, which would also improve security. The property is neither listed, or in a conservation area and has no issues associated with privacy, or overlooking. Under normal circumstances, had the building enjoyed a previous residential consent, the proposals to install the patio doors would have come under permitted development and not required planning consent.

The proposals serve to vastly improve the visual, spatial and daylight amenity to the property without impacting upon the significance to the Village of Westruther.

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