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## Apartments Planned for Historic Birstall Chapel Await Bat Survey Green Light

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— Categories: Real Estate



A proposal to convert a historic chapel in Birstall into 21 apartments has been recommended for approval, pending the outcome of a wildlife survey to determine if bats are present on the site.

Wesley House, a Grade II-listed former place of worship located at the corner of Huddersfield Road and Chapel Lane, has been earmarked for residential redevelopment. Once known as the Church of St John, the building is set within a designated conservation

area and holds architectural and historic significance, particularly its links to prominent Methodist figure John Nelson.

Planning officers at Kirklees Council have advised councillors to approve the scheme when it comes before the Strategic Planning Committee on July 31. However, they stress that if the ongoing bat survey confirms the presence of bats, the application could be refused. Officers described it as a “strong” reason for turning down the conversion due to strict wildlife protection laws.

Medipharm Bradford Limited submitted the application, arguing that the property has struggled to attract buyers despite being on the market for several years. As a result, the applicant says repurposing the building for residential use is now the most viable option.

Wesley House previously secured planning permission to be converted into 21 apartments, but that approval has since expired, prompting the need for a new application.

So far, five public comments have been received regarding the proposal. Three are objections, one is in support, and one is a general observation. Concerns have been raised about the potential strain the development could place on local infrastructure, particularly traffic and parking.

One objector wrote: “Huddersfield Road is extremely congested as it is, with the local schools even more traffic and cars will be damaging to the area, let alone parking.”

Others have acknowledged the building’s historic value and the need for sensitive regeneration. One supporter commented, “This former Chapel is an important part of Birstall’s history with its connections to John Nelson, so it definitely needs preserving.

“If these apartments are for rent or purchase, they will hopefully attract people into the area who may work in surrounding towns and for those commuting via motorway networks.”

Kirklees Council will also weigh the proposed development’s impact on the conservation area and listed building status. Any work carried out would need to preserve or enhance the character of the structure and surrounding area, in line with planning regulations for heritage assets.

The push to repurpose heritage buildings for residential use continues to gain traction across West Yorkshire and wider regions, particularly as councils and developers look for

practical ways to meet housing demands while maintaining the historic fabric of towns.

If approved, the project would provide 21 new homes in a location with access to local amenities and key transport links. Critics argue that more attention must be paid to existing traffic concerns and limited parking availability.

The council's Strategic Planning Committee will make the final decision during its meeting next week. The outcome of the bat survey is expected to play a crucial role in determining the project's future.