

NEW STEEL WINDOWS - FULFILLING PLANNING CRITERIA FOR SENSITIVE CHURCH CONVERSIONS

Sadly for the religious among us many of the UK's historic churches have been deconsecrated. A fall in the number of churchgoers and the dangers of crumbling walls, toppling towers or high level stonework have contributed to this fact.

For property developers, however, this is nothing short of good news. Churches tend to be home to sought after features such as high ceilings, period details and large, interestingly shaped or stained glass windows and they are usually located in the centre of the town or village - and these are all things that appear at the top of discerning homebuyers' wish lists when searching for a new property.

Converting a church into a home is a major renovation project but one that is becoming increasingly common as often the authorities prefer to see historic buildings remaining in use rather than being demolished to make way for more modern structures. Many churches are the centre of their community before they fall into underuse and disrepair and as such they provide important landmarks to local people.

However, the planning process for church conversions can be complex. Many churches are listed and located in Conservation Areas meaning various consents may be required and there may be limits to what alterations can be made. Sometimes permission is also required from the church authorities. Usually Planning and Conservation Officers will insist that the exterior appearance of the building remains intact, but the interesting interior spaces offered by former religious buildings can result in a slice of interior design heaven.

There are usually restrictions on how many new window or door openings can be included and planners and Conservation Officers may want to explore the restoration of windows in the first instance. However, the market for replacement windows continues to gain ground with

*Below, Exterior view of The Tracery, Shropshire.
Photography: Charters Property Ltd*



a whole host of ground-breaking, technological advances. New steel windows can be manufactured to provide a near exact match to the original fenestration so that the original character and appearance of the church can be retained while introducing benefits such as modern insulation, better weatherproofing and increased security through features such as double glazing and thermal barriers. Additional light can be introduced to otherwise dark spaces through the installation of conservation rooflights, roof windows with all the good looks of a given architectural period but which meet the latest performance requirements of Building Regulations too.

The Tracery in Shropshire is a case in point. A chapel was first built at Swan Hill in the town of Shrewsbury in 1767. In 1868, the chapel was demolished and replaced with the current building. Schoolrooms were then added in 1880. Charters Property Ltd, who specialise in property development, consultancy and project management, recently purchased the deconsecrated church and set to work on transforming the building into a prestigious development of four fabulous homes.

Sensitivity was key when renovating the property and the majority of the original features were preserved. Original stone walls, lintels and cills were all repaired and impeccably replaced. The walls and roofs were insulated and

energy saving measures were implemented to create a comfortable, efficient living environment.

Although it was possible to restore some of the original fenestration, double glazed replacement steel windows were still required throughout the building. Clement were thrilled to manufacture these new steel windows and doors. Various Clement ranges had to be selected to meet the different criteria required for the project. For example, the Brooking range was used for the beautiful arched head windows on the front elevation as it would best replicate the originals which would have been silicone fronted. The Clement EB16 range was used for other windows where silicone fronting was not required and Clement W20 was used to make the steel doors. In total over thirty individual windows were specified, all in various shapes and sizes.

Clement 2 and 4 Conservation Rooflights were also installed throughout, allowing masses of natural light in through the beautiful, high ceilings while remaining in keeping with the traditional period look of the exterior.

James Charters, Director of Charters Property, said: *"We were very pleased with the attention to detail and finish of the steel windows. Clement took ownership of their section of the project and were able to deliver a complex scheme on time and to a very good standard. They remained client focused throughout and we will happily use their service again."*



Above, Clement EB16 windows and Clement Conservation Rooflights at The Tracery, Shropshire. Photography: Charters Property Ltd



Above, Clement W20 doors at The Tracery, Shropshire. Photography: Charters Property Ltd

"We have used Clement rooflights on numerous projects and appreciate the fast delivery and easy installation. Their products have met with Local Authority approval on all of our heritage sensitive work. This means we can specify a great looking product in the knowledge that it will also fulfil our planning criteria. We will continue to use Clement rooflights on future projects."

Another wonderful example of a traditional church being converted into luxury accommodation while keeping the striking period features of both the interior and exterior is The Sanctuary in London's Battersea. This 19th century church, formerly St Paul's, is a Listed Building which has been impressively converted into four luxury apartments and one stunning new build house.

The church sits in a prominent position at the top of St John's Hill in Battersea and the James Laurence Group had to work closely alongside the London Borough of Wandsworth Planning Department in order to agree how this historic building should be best restored and provided with a new lease of life. Clement were chosen to supply all of the new steel windows and conservation rooflights.

The bespoke demands of the project required Clement to use two steel window ranges, sometimes within the same aperture, to achieve the exact look required. Both the Clement W20 range and the Clement EB24 range were fitted to create the beautiful shaped windows which include club heads. All of the new windows comply to Part L.

A variety of rooflight shapes and sizes were also chosen to suit various room requirements, including Clement 3, 4, 5 and 6, all standard sizes available from stock. A slate profile was specified to achieve a flush finish on the outside of the building. The rooflights were fitted with matching brass 300mm hand winders to match the interior.

The project was included within a case study for English Heritage, Heritage Counts, in 2015.

Nick Laurence, co-founder of The James Laurence Group, said: *"We wanted to create something high quality but out of the ordinary and to play on the building's idiosyncratic features. The windows supplied by Clement are unusual and make a statement whilst simultaneously satisfying the demands of the Conservation Officers. We are delighted with the end result."*



Above, The Sanctuary, St John's Hill, Battersea, restored by The James Laurence Group

These two examples – The Tracery and The Sanctuary – demonstrate how new steel windows are a great choice for a church conversion, however sensitive, meeting the stringent requirements of planning regulations. The versatility and elegant sightlines only possible with steel, together with innovative glazing options, multi-point locking and ease of maintenance, mean that steel windows not only look good and in keeping with the church's original exterior, but they also help to provide to all the comforts of 20th century living expected by today's homeowners.

The Clement Windows Group manufactures an innovative range of steel windows, doors and screens for both private residences and commercial projects. Based just outside London, in Surrey, Clement also manufactures a selection of conservation rooflights, available from stock in either a tile or a slate profile.

Clement Windows Group

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Below, Windows from the Clement EB24 range - purpose made, hand crafted angle frames to replicate the original shapes - and Clement Conservation Rooflights.'

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