

Places of Worship and D1 User Class Buildings

This is part of a series of articles that we have written regarding commercial properties. We broadly divide our commercial properties between the areas of:

1. Retail

Shops both large and small

2. Industrial buildings

Warehouses, large and small and also smaller workshops to large distribution centres.

3. Offices

From the small traditional building that has been converted into offices to the large purpose built multi-storey office block.

4. Statutory Bodies and Places of Worship

This can be anything from fire stations, to churches, chapels and places of worship.

5. Leisure / Hospitality

This seems to be an ever increasing area, ranging from public houses, sports centres, the care home sector and anything from B&B to hotels.

In this article we look at places of worship.

Independent Surveyors and Places of Worship Surveys

Who are we? We are Independent Surveyors who have worked on many different types of properties from commercial surveys on everything from places of worship, industrial buildings,

retail units, warehouses, shops and hotels. We have surveyed them all over the years. We carry out mainly building surveys and structural surveys as we feel these offer the best advice for a potential purchaser and give you the reassurance that you are doing the correct due diligence when looking to buy or rent a place of worship.

Valuing places of worship

We can also provide Independent Valuations for places of worship as we are not owned by any bank, building society or mortgage lender and therefore don't have an invested interest. We are very proud of our high standards of surveying places of worship when buying freehold. We have a wealth of knowledge on just about anything property related. Please do not hesitate to call us on our free phone number **0800 298 5424**. We have helped out our fair share of places of worship over the years. We look forward to hearing from you.



Surveying churches to buy

We have been involved in the sale and purchase of traditional places of worship and also in the rental of a traditional place of worship but what we wish to discuss here is where a place of worship involves buying buildings that are having a change of use to a D1 User Class and how we can help this process run smoothly.



We have given property advice on several of these recently and we feel this would be of benefit to anyone dealing with this type of D1 User Class purchase. We are aware that many people dealing with the purchase of a place of worship are not regularly dealing in the property market and as such their first experience of the commercial property market is when they are involved with the purchase of this place of worship.

In our experience most selling agents will advise that D1 User Class is very rare and often referred to as a unicorn type building and said to have a massive premium. In our experience D1 User Class isn't as unique as many estate agents may make you think. You get a feel for the sort of savings that can be made when a good survey is carried out. We are currently still in negotiations on one D1 User Class premises that was originally for sale at 6 million. With us being involved it has now being re-valued at 4.9 million, a saving of 1.1 million and we feel that the ultimate figure will be lower still.

How do you check the value of a D1 User Class / House of Worship?

We have been involved in two other cases where the initial price, in the millions, has been halved when we had cold hard look at the property. This is very specific to each particular case concerned. The properties that are concerned which may be listed may have other potential uses that would give them a higher value.

Should D1 Houses of Worship be expensive?

To some extent properties that are suitable for use as a Church/ new House of Worship are relatively rare. This is compounded if the building is not currently used as a place of worship, meaning it will not have D1 User Class. This change of user class to D1 is considered by many to be very hard to obtain and as such commands a high premium. Whilst we agree it can be hard to obtain D1 User Class we disagree with the high premium prices that are being paid as at the end

of the day if a property has defects regardless of whether or not it's a D1 User Class property it will still need repair.

What do Surveyors do when they are surveying a House of Worship compared with bank Surveyors?

First of all we are Independent Surveyors which means we are independent of any sale and independent of any percentage incentive related to the sale or the mortgage.

This one factor is very important as it means we can advise you as our sole client. What most clients don't understand is that many chartered surveyors are owned by estate agents, banks and building societies and other mortgage lenders and therefore can't give you, we believe, the best advice as their loyalties are split. We would always recommend you use an Independent Surveyor.



Independent Surveyors?

A good way, although not 100% is to ask the surveyors either directly yourselves or via your solicitors if they are independent of any mortgage lenders or any other incentive scheme and ask them to put this in writing. The sales and the surveying and property industry can be very closely knitted together. We have seen Estate Agents arrive at a property in the same car as the Surveyor who is meant to be working for the purchaser. We feel too close a relationship with the Estate Agent is unhealthy. The person buying the property is our one and only client.

A better way of establishing if a Surveyor is independent is to see if they are members of the Independent Surveyors and Valuers Association - which we are! We personally don't think it is enough for them to declare themselves as independent as we have come across several cases where often, in a legal sense, they are independent but they are incentivised or they have reciprocal agreements with estate agents and mortgage advisors to pass the surveys on. This is now so ingrained in the surveying industry that it is considered perfectly normal practise and the surveyors still consider themselves independent if they are not actually owned by the company. To give you an idea we think that 95% of all surveyors are not truly independent and this is probably a higher percentage when looking at the larger companies.

Meet the Surveyor at the property you are looking to buy is our best bit of advice.

In addition to ensuring they are Independent Surveyors you need to ensure that they have a good understanding of what places of worship require and how your particular place of worship works. We always get to know our clients. We have as a standard requirement that the client meets us at the property during the course of the survey and we are more than happy to give feedback there and then and end and tailor make our surveys to your requirements.



Can I see an example of your survey report?

It's important to see an example of the surveyor's surveys to ensure they are the sort of thing you want. We are more than happy to email you copies of our surveys to see the format that they all follow but it has to be remembered that each one is individually tailored to the client's requirements and needs.

Things that we have found that could cost your place of worship a lot of money

With the various places of church and places of worship surveys that we have carried out we have found everything from vertical cracking where the structural frame of the place of worship was failing due to hidden asbestos both at roof level and as insulation to heating pipes. We have also found hidden woodworm within one roof that was so bad that sections of the roof would need replacing. We have found electrical installations that are extremely old and we have found floors that are not capable of taking the weight of a congregation.



We have found old concrete repairs on a property where the sellers/vendors knew very well that there was a problem with this and had tried to hide it. We have found flat roof areas that leak through the structure and have soaked into it like blotting paper.

What do you do when problems are found with a place of worship?

If these problems are found before you purchase it then it allows you to go in with your eyes wide open and negotiate on the sort of costs that you need to put these things right. All our surveys have an Executive Summary to highlight the main items. We also include an Action Required with various ways to repair a property in many instances.



Finally we look at Anticipated Costs and our costs not only consider the materials but they also look at access requirement as sometimes scaffolding will be needed, sometimes specialist lifting devices.

We would reiterate we are more than happy for you to walk around with us whilst we are carrying out the survey.