

Parish Meeting 26th April 2015 at 3pm in Pastoral Centre

Present: Father Owen Ness
Allison Kerr (chair)
John Hasting
Deacon John McGarry

Around 100 parishioners attended.

Allison Kerr welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked Deacon John to open with a prayer. John asked for the influence of the Holy Spirit on our discussion, and encouraged us with the words of Julian of Norwich, "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

Purpose of meeting: Allison explained that today's meeting would focus on how the Parish looks after, and will look after, its place of worship.

Role of the Diocese: In a spirit of openness, Fr Ness confirmed that he will not be here when the building project is underway, but assured the meeting that there will be a priest here, who will consider the wishes and priorities of the parishioners. However any decisions will be subject to the approval of the Bishop through the Diocesan property manager - presently Guy Logan who is a surveyor. As Guy Logan has no staff to support him, John Hastings of our parish has been supporting Guy Logan with the preliminary work and liaises with him.

Our ultimate aim is to keep the parish together as a strong Christian Community throughout the closure of the church over the period of repair.

Building works: What building works are happening?

- a. Parish hall extension – likely to start by mid-May and be completed by around mid July – **fully funded**. Most of this work will be external so there will be minimal impact on the use of the hall up until the final stages.
- b. Completing minor works, i.e. taking down glass partitions, repairing and replacing doors in piazza and Plattthorn Drive, a new wheelchair ramp and piety stall and seating in the elevated area - Due to start in near future, some aspects are still under consideration by Historic Scotland - **essentially, fully funded**
- c. Major works – this will involve church closure, stripping of church, storage of pews, protection of altar, building internal working platform and external scaffolding and weather-proof cover over the roof.
Major structural strengthening of back and front walls which support the roof and strengthening the roof which does not meet current building standards.
Overhaul of external roof, gutters and drains, repairing / replacing rotting timbers and sealing roof leaks, improving natural light
Extensive brickwork repairs mainly external from roof to ground level

Installing new lighting which is easier to maintain.

A maintenance programme will then be set up to replace lights every 5 years, using a cherry-picker crane.

Only partially funded

d. Unbudgeted work – underfloor or other heating, etc - **No funding at present**

The aim of the principal grant funding bodies is to bring church back closer to its original design, while also setting up ongoing maintenance programmes to protect the future of the building.

Financial commitment

Grants are available for some of this work due to the iconic status of the St Bride's building as a world-class modernist brick building.

- a) Parish hall extension
Viridor grant (£73,000) along with a parishioner legacy
- b) Minor works – costs (£91,000) largely covered by Viridor grant and parish third party contribution (already paid)
- c) Major works – £2 million (includes budget for contingencies), less VAT relief (£334,000), Viridor grant (£1 million), Lottery Heritage Fund (£310,000)

The parish must make a third party contribution of £102,000 by early/mid July to fulfil the terms of the grant from Viridor. This must come from the parish, not Diocesan funds or any outside source.

This leaves a further balance of £256,000 (to be funded by further grants and debt on parish)

- d) Potential further works, e.g. underfloor heating are unfunded.
- e) Cost of ongoing maintenance to church, parish house and meeting rooms and church hall must also be funded either by the parish or outside sources.

Fund raising

- a) Urgent need (by early July) for £102,000 third party contribution, as a condition of award of £1 million Viridor grant.
This could be done partly from existing parish funds along with parishioner donations, especially if donations maximise use of gift aid.
In the event that the full amount is not raised by donations or fundraising, a fall back option already suggested is parishioner loans, although these would only provide a temporary solution.
- b) Once this amount is raised we can continue to pursue grant funding bodies. The balance of the debt falls on the parish through diocesan mortgage (10 year term with annual repayment schedule). We will also need an ongoing annual contingency for repair and maintenance.

Parish fabric committee

Father Ness acknowledged the enormous contribution made by John Hastings in his preparatory work and his liaising with Guy Logan.

2 years ago the parish commissioned a full building survey at a cost of £100,000 for a grant application which was not followed through at that time. However this survey has enabled the application to be made to Viridor which resulted in the award of the £1million grant.

Father Ness explained how a fabric committee would enable the well-informed involvement of parishioners. Its roles could include leading fund raising activities, helping with grant submissions, diocesan and contractor liaison, financial and project supervision / decision-making, and organising broader parishioner help when needed.

It is also hoped to set up a specific web-site as permanent architectural record of the building to create a visitor guide to the church and to support grant award fundraising on permanent basis.

Amendment of present management of the Licensed business of the Parish Centre

Father Ness also informed the meeting that the bar manager Paul Reilly will shortly be standing down from his role and someone from the parish is needed to take over supervision of bar staff etc. The hall is a valuable asset to the parish as it supports parish income as well as being available for parish use.

Question and Answer Session

(Questions from the floor and responses from Fr Ness (OJN), John Hastings (JH) and Allison Kerr (AK))

PROVISION FOR MASS WHEN THE CHURCH IS CLOSED

Q: What are the costs of having Mass elsewhere?

A: (OJN) Midweek Mass could be celebrated in the Hall with no extra cost. Funerals and First Holy Communion etc would be hosted by other churches in the Deanery. Father Ness's liturgical preference would be to use the High School at weekends if possible, as it's close to the Church, we already have strong links with the school community, and it's big enough.

The hall is not a suitable spiritual venue for large masses (and Alfredo says under fire regulations it only has the capacity to seat 120).

It has been suggested that we might ask to use the Old Parish Church but this has not been investigated.

A: (JH) Councillor Alice Marie Mitchell is going to investigate possibility of using the school and find out what the rate would be for "Community Use". Additional sacristans would be needed to set up the space each week.

(OJN) It is important to maintain the relationship with the school but bear in mind the next priest may not be the school chaplain. A new head teacher has just been appointed to the school.

Q: What is the capacity of the school? Would all 4 Masses be retained?

A: (OJN) I would be reluctant to disrupt the existing leases of the Hall for Saturday night Mass. One option may be 2 Sunday morning Masses in the school, with Sunday evening Mass in the Hall. The incoming parish priest would need to be consulted on this.

Q: Might it be more cost-effective to use the Ballerup Hall, which has a large seating capacity?

A: (OJN) The school can hold 600-800 and using the school would help preserve parish identity as it's next to the church building.

A: (JH) Parking charges are applied 7 days a week at the Ballerup Hall.

Q: (OJN) Can we establish the view of parishioners on where to go for Mass, with a view to holding the parish together spiritually?

A: It was the view of all present that no-one wants to disperse to other parishes for the duration of the project.

Q: Can parishioners be presented with a summary of the costs associated with different Mass venues, with a note as to the pros and cons of each option?

A: (OJN) Yes it would be good to let an incoming priest know the wishes of the parishioners as a whole. We are obtaining costs of different options at present. The significant annual cost of heat and light for the building will set off against the hire charges for the selected temporary venue.

Q: Wouldn't it be quite easy to bring an altar and stations etc from the church into the hall, to make it a spiritual space, thus saving money on alternative venues? People are going to drift away to other parishes anyway.

A: (OJN) As mentioned above, Health & Safety limitations do not make use of the hall practicable and the hall is also regularly used by many in the community and by the parish itself for Children's Liturgy, a use which may be extended this year. We wish to retain our relationship with the clubs and societies that use the hall. It is a community resource and a significant revenue generator for the parish. The experience of the priest and deacon when celebrating Mass in the Hall on a Thursday leads them to conclude that the spiritual quality of the Sunday Eucharist would be significantly impaired if the Hall was to be used for other than the Sunday evening Mass. The new priest of the parish may look to restrict the current four Masses on Sunday to three which would have an impact on costs which ever venue is selected.

A: (AK) We want to avoid having people drifting away. Once cost figures are available for various venues, we could survey parishioners as they leave Mass and also online, to let everyone participate in the decision.

Q: Isn't time of the essence?

A: (AK) Yes, but informed choice is important. It could be done within a couple of weeks.

Q: Will we be taking a vote today on where we will hold Mass?

A: (OJN) No, but once all the information about different venues has been obtained we will put it to all the parishioners. We will need to set up a fabric committee. We need urgently to extend the circle of people in the parish who can be relied on to help, and to draw young families into the mix.

Q: No-one wants to disperse to other parishes. We must find somewhere we can meet together.

A: The meeting strongly agreed with this.

FUNDRAISING

Q: If someone wanted to make a donation, who would the cheque be payable to?

A: (JH) We will make a facility available in the near future. However, arrangements are already in place should anyone wish to make a donation privately to Father Ness. Again I would stress the importance of Gift-Aiding any donation if possible. The funds recovered from the Inland Revenue can be back with the Parish in as little as 5 weeks and add a further 25p to every £1 donation.

A: (OJN) Parishioners regularly make monetary donations anonymously for the good of the Parish through the priest for all sorts of reasons – sometimes in memory of a relative. This generosity is both a significant and a sincere expression of the love these parishioners have for God, for the Church and for this parish and our community. It is both appropriate [and especially encouraged by the Diocese] at this time to help meet the cost of the major repairs programme to the building because it is offered for the good of the community.

Q: If you have already set up Gift Aid, can you do it again?

A: (JH) As long as the total sum you are reclaiming in Gift Aid doesn't exceed the amount you have paid in Income Tax, there is no limit to the number of times you can Gift Aid your donations to different charities.

Q: When we begin fundraising can we set up a "Just Giving" page on the internet? This also allows Gift Aid, and people outwith the parish could easily donate.

A: (JH) Yes, this is an excellent idea.

Q: Can we have a list of the grant funding bodies already applied to, to avoid duplication?

A: (JH) We have a list of grant sourcing bodies, but it is not complete so there are still grant-funding bodies to identify – some award very small, specifically targeted grants. Some are time limited. Improving accessibility to the building can be a key to open up some areas of funding. We should be creative in sourcing grant aid. Examples include a doors-open day, a special website, and a blog.

Q: Raising the £102,000 – there is an urgent need and a short period of time. Are we hopeful it can be achieved, and what if we don't succeed?

(JH): (a) It has been suggested to me that if 60 parish families were each able to contribute £1000, and gift aided it, we could meet our immediate target. I have been told that some people put away money for "a rainy day" and that the rainy day has arrived.

However, individual circumstances vary. We welcome every £1 of donation and we want opportunities for fund raising opportunities for every age of parishioners from school-children upwards (see below). Each parishioner must consider their own personal circumstances, and again the importance of Gift Aid can't be over-emphasised.

(b) Some parishioners have intimated that they could make a loan to the parish if there is a problem meeting the July deadline.

Overall, I'm confident we'll raise the money needed immediately in the time available.

Q: Can you have forms for donations available soon?

A: (JH) Yes, as soon as possible, I'm already working on it.

A: (OJN) Often priests are reluctant to ask for money but people are ready and willing to give it. We must leave it to individual parishioners to give what they can.

Q: If we don't achieve the fundraising target of £102,000 in time, what then? And what about the rest of the funds needed?

A: (JH) I'm confident the money will be raised. We have to start work in Aug/Sept to activate the grant. Fundraising can then continue for the remaining £258,000, which can be sourced in part from grant bodies with the balance from ongoing donations and a Diocesan mortgage.

UNDERFLOOR HEATING

Q: I'm a bit worried about the benefits of reinstating the underfloor heating. The heat takes a long time to build up and to dissipate. Our present heating system is warm and responsive.

A: (JH) Yes, our present heating system is quick, but there are some concerns that the radiant heat will tend to dry out and damage the pews. Underfloor heating CAN work although it needs to be switched on about 2 hours before it's needed. The heat only goes up to about head height so it's not wasted. Bl John Duns Scotus Church (in the Gorbals) has a new underfloor heating system; it will be interesting to see how they get on with it. This topic is still up for debate. Some people find the current heaters visually unattractive, but others value its immediacy; some compromise is inevitable. Recall also that there is no present funding for any new system.

Q: Gas heaters are more economical to run, and underfloor heating is less effective.

A: (JH) This may well be the case, and there is no budget for replacing heating. It's not part of the funded scheme and any decision on this will be made by the parishioners, not the architects.

A: (OJN) It's important not to lose sight of the fundamental problem of water ingress, especially in and around the Sanctuary where quite apart from the very serious damage to the fabric of the building, the noise of water penetration immediately behind the altar makes it very difficult to celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy for the community. This is serious and MUST be addressed NOW. The Viridor Grant will expire in August if we don't activate it by raising £102,000 and by beginning work. The investigations and preliminary work on the external brickwork of the building - which will soon begin by the masonry company - will fulfil this condition.

OTHER TOPICS

Q: How far back do we want to go in stripping the building back to its “original state”.

A: (JH) All sorts of problems can arise – for example the bricks are non-standard, Imperial sizes, and it’s very difficult to replace individual bricks. Historic Scotland has expertise in this and are reasonably pragmatic in their requirements. They are more interested in the fabric of the building than its furnishing.

Q: When we survey the parishioners about possible Mass venues, can we also ask for simple suggestions for fundraising ideas, including easy ways to allow children and teenagers to get involved?

A: (AK) Yes, a good idea.

Q: Will the lead on the roof get re-used? It has considerable scrap value, and so have the roof timbers.

A: (JH) A lot of what is on the roof is copper, much of which can be re-used. The timbers will be retained, unless rotted. The contractors are all keen on recycling where possible, and this has been factored into the costs.

Q: As well as the Fabric Committee, can we have a “Keep St Bride’s Together” committee?

A: The meeting agreed this was a good idea, eg organising social events.

Finally, anyone who wished to volunteer their services was asked to give their names to John Hastings.

The meeting closed with a prayer from Fr Ness, who reminded us that everything we do should be AMDG (ad majorem Dei gloriam – for the greater glory of God).