

1.0 Introduction

Soon after his arrival in the parish in the autumn of 2021, and at a meeting of the Parish Finance Council (PFC), Mgr Bernard Massey, in response to the challenge of how to maintain our parish buildings in the medium and long term, suggested that, as a first step, the PFC consult the parish on this matter by means of a questionnaire to be followed up by a parish general meeting and a final report submitted to the Diocese. Accordingly, advice was sought from Ms Jo Long, the Diocesan Property Officer on the design of a questionnaire and a pilot questionnaire was sent to all members of the PFC. Finally, on two Sundays in October 2022, final versions of the questionnaire were distributed after all masses and an electronic version was attached to the parish newsletter on the parish website. Copies of the questionnaire were also left available at the back of the church during the response period, which was until Sunday 13th November 2022. Questionnaires were also delivered to housebound parishioners by Eucharistic ministers and by the parish welfare team. 250 copies of the questionnaire were printed and 240 distributed. 34 completed questionnaires were returned either through a posting box at the back of the church or by post. Six completed pilot questionnaires were also included, giving a total of 40 returns.

2.0 Feedback

2.1 Diocesan, pastoral and financial background information. First and foremost (four responses) was the need for the Diocese to declare its policy for the future groupings and staffing of parishes, considering the reduced number of clergy available for placement in parishes that can be anticipated in the future. Respondents (3) also stated that without greater and more detailed financial information they could not give full answers to the questions. Three respondents indicated that an overarching pastoral perspective was needed in order to reply in a considered manner; the parish needed to be clear on its mission and direction and only in this context could questions about the use and future of parish buildings be answered.

2.2 What should we do with the church building itself? There were 25 responses agreeing that the church be converted into a multi-purpose building, functioning as a community space and a parish hall as well as place of prayer and worship. 13 responses expressed a desire to keep the church as it is: a place for public worship, and also individual quiet prayer, reflection and meditation as well as being a space large enough for Masses on major feast days and for weddings and funerals. All respondents were aware of the costs of heating and maintaining the church and of the present shortage of funds to do so. Three responses referred to other churches around the country that had converted their church building to multi-purpose use.

2.3 What should we do with the presbytery? 28 responses advocated re-developing the presbytery and suggestions for new uses included parish rooms and offices, a chapel to supplement any change in use of the church, sheltered accommodation, a replacement for the parish hall, additional business centre units, new accommodation for the parish priest and flats to be sold at a commercial rate. Only three responses called for the presbytery to be kept as it is which, in contrast to the number of calls for re-

development of the building shows a general awareness that all the space in the presbytery is being under-used at present. Three responses stated the need for a new ground floor kitchen in the presbytery but did not make clear as to whether this should be done as part of a wider re-development or not.

2.4 Should we build a new home for the parish priest? 18 responses considered building new accommodation for the parish priest, possibly on the present parish hut land, or on land at the back of the presbytery and to the rear of the Business Centre. Respondents explained that building new clergy accommodation would enable a more comprehensive and untrammelled re-development of the presbytery. One suggestion was that a new property be bought locally so that the presbytery could be sited more within the community.

2.5 What should we do with the parish hall? 12 responses were for keeping the parish hall but refurbishing it so that it could be hired out more easily and continue to be used for parish events. Three responses were for an unspecified conversion of the parish hall and a further 12 responses said that the hall should be converted into additional business centre units, thus bringing in a guaranteed income for the parish. With regard to hiring out the hall, one response was for the appointment of an agent to manage the hall in much the same way as Bristol Spaceworks manages the Business Centre now. Four responses highlighted access problems with the parish hall and emphasised the need for the installation of a lift.

2.6 What should we do with the Business Centre? There was extremely strong support for keeping the Business Centre as it is (30 responses). The Centre is universally regarded as one of the great successes of the parish in recent years and, as respondents pointed out, income from it is helping to fund the parish and will continue to do so for some time to come.

2.7 What should we do with the parish hut and the land that it occupies? 21 responses were for either developing or selling the parish hut land and four were for keeping it as it is. Mention was made of the Franciscan covenant on the land, access problems, issues with obtaining planning permission and objections from neighbours, but these were not seen as reasons not to go ahead. Four responses were for accommodating the parish priest on one of several residential properties to be built on the site. There were calls for keeping the site for youth activities, saying that young people needed more provision within the parish and a desire for Guide and Scout activities to be re-located in a developed/refurbished parish hall or presbytery if the site were developed for other purposes.

2.8 What else did respondents have to say about the parish estate? Serving the community was a theme in several of the responses; part of the parish estate could be used for affordable housing to home refugees, for example. A refurbished and improved parish hall could be hired out more easily for community use; a re-purposed presbytery could also host community activities within and beyond the parish. There was one call for a social committee to drive and manage such activities.

Four responses advocated the use of green technologies, both to help the environment and to reduce the parish's huge energy bill. The installation of ground and air source heat pumps, solar panels and wind turbines were mentioned as well as better building insulation. Three responses were adamant that

no part of the church estate should be sold off and that once property or land is sold an asset is lost forever. Instead, the parish should look to lease or rent any new or re-furbished buildings it creates.

Four responses suggested the parish seek grants and funding from bodies such as the National Lottery.

2.0 *Conclusion*. Although there is a consensus that the church itself be preserved, a majority of responses favoured converting the church into a multi-purpose building because to do so would make best use of space and create an energy-efficient building if the problems of insulation and heating can be solved. Most responses supported a conversion of the presbytery to make better use of its space and there was also support for a new house to be built for the parish priest. Respondents recognised the need to refurbish the parish hall for whatever future use is decided and stressed the importance of providing good access for all to the hall. There is unanimous agreement that the Business Centre, being as successful as it is, should continue to operate and possibly expand into parts of adjacent spaces in the parish hall and presbytery. There was no opposition to the parish hut land being developed, but there was a call for alternative accommodation to be provided for youth organisations. Overall, it was clear from the responses that there is a concern to preserve the heritage of the parish and not lose assets which may be needed in the future and also to ensure that the parish can serve the community.