**Building the future of our parish – your thoughts & suggestions**

Our parish is – in the words of the First Letter of St Peter – **“living stones, building a spiritual house.”** Nearly 170 years ago our predecessors had a vision for a school, church and hall to enable Catholics in Romford to celebrate and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is a precious history: Catholic worship had been suppressed in England for over 250 years, and Catholic Dioceses were only restored in 1850. Our church, whose foundations were laid just four years later, is one of the most complete post-Reformation churches in the country, which is why it is a Grade 2 listed building.

Over the years the school has grown from one room by the church to a thriving community of over 350 children in its location on Dorset Avenue. The parish serves at least 500 families, and we are a fixture within the wider community in Romford. The charitable work of the parish is immense.

In the last 50-60 years there have been various developments around the parish facilities; the hall has served the parish for much of that time, and there was also a club on the site for many years.

However, for the last 25 years or so, almost nothing has been done to the fabric of our buildings, and they are in need of great attention. This is not for want of trying – plans have been developed, and avenues explored. The fruit of that work is most certainly reflected in what is presented to you today, for your thoughts and comments.

We are very, very fortunate; the site on which Number 1 Park End Road once stood has, over the decades, become a valuable piece of land. With careful budgeting, development on that land will pay for everything in these plans, and an interior redecoration of the church. It will leave us with money to be able to reach out into the community, in youth ministry and in service to the frail and elderly.

Please take time with everything presented here – time with the plans, time with the questions, and time to consider your thoughts and suggestions. There are limitations about what we can do – most notably the requirement to preserve the church intact. Within those limitations I hope and pray that we have arrived at a set of plans which will give us buildings fit for another century and able to withstand the challenges and changes of the years ahead, while serving to keep the light of Christ in the heart of Romford.

I would like to thank the small group of parishioners who have been a “sounding board” to get us this far – the Premises Committee of John Swallow, Mark O’Donoghue, and Julia Pitkin, as well as all their predecessors, who have given their energy and care to this for many years, along with the group of leaders of parish groups, and Sacramental programmes, who have been part of the conversation since the start of 2020.

In the middle of a pandemic, when we cannot gather, is this the best time to launch such plans? In some ways, absolutely not! But such plans are also a much needed sign of hope. Practically, as we do not know when restrictions will ease, there is an opportunity here to get ahead so that when, God willing, we can gather again, the building project is well advanced, so we will be in a place to offer fresh hope, fresh facilities, fresh service and fresh presence to a town and parish community that will be ever more in need of the love of Christ the longer the pandemic continues.

Thank you for your kindness and encouragement so far; thank you for your time with these plans, and for any comments, thoughts and ideas that you offer. Whether you say “Well done – go for it!” or “Rip it up and start again” you will be listened to with care.

Please keep it all in your prayers.

With many blessings,

Fr Dominic

**Key benefits of what is proposed:**

**Church**

* A new main entrance to the church, with a narthex area for pushchairs and buggies, as well as for standing if Mass is very full
* Preservation of all the historic, beautiful and significant features of the existing church; the font will be relocated within the church to just inside the new doors; the rest of the church will be redecorated and otherwise untouched.
* Fully flat/ramped entrance, and direct link to the hall – no steps for wheelchair users to navigate
* Toilet facilities that are clean, modern and within a linked building
* Repository within a linked building, visible from the new entrance
* Vastly improved sacristy facilities for servers and priest
* Baby change facility, and accessible toilets
* Linked building for refreshments after Mass
* Piazza for wedding cars, or funeral cars; a wide and open entrance way, with no difficult turns to navigate

**Parish Centre**

* Fully refurbished, modern facilities, making excellent use of the existing building
* A main hall seating 72 at tables, or 110 theatre style; a well equipped kitchen for refreshments; storage in dedicated areas.
* The height of the existing building used to provide an attractive mezzanine space for a smaller hall seating 32 at tables, 50-60 theatre style.
* A small meeting room for 6-8 people, for smaller parish groups/committees
* French doors within the main hall, opening onto a patio and garden area between the hall and the church
* Overall, these should be ideal for both parish use, for the variety of groups we already have, and those we have yet to dream of, for all ages. They will be available for private hire, as well as for community use, as a way to engage with the wider community, and to generate income for the parish.

In addition, we will be paying particular attention to:

**Historic Churches requirements.** The materials used, and final plans, will be in accordance with guidance and advice from experts in this field, to ensure the heritage we treasure is preserved.

**Green space and landscaping.** The whole area along the front of the presbytery, church and hall can be one large green area, with extra prominence give to Our Lady’s Grotto, and landscaping with plants and flowers to attract bees and butterflies.

**Green energy.** We will build, heat, light and insulate the building in a way which is as environmentally attentive as possible, in the short term of the build itself, and for the future.

**Car parking.** The piazza will include cycle racks, and we hope many parishioners will walk or cycle to church. Where that is impossible, the car park will now include 15 marked bays, including disabled bays.

**Frequently asked questions**

*On the website, this section will grow, as we receive questions, reflect on them and respond to them. For now, these are the key questions that have come up in discussions at the Premises Committee, and with those who lead groups within the existing parish centre and parish hall.*

**We did all this 20 years ago. There was even a scale model in the parish centre. What will be different this time? I don’t want to be disappointed again.**

There is undoubtedly hurt and disappointment that remains from the earlier projects. We can’t change the past, but can learn from it – a lot of the wisdom from the plans made in Fr Kevin’s time is incorporated into the new project, and hopefully this will bring a lot of that to fruition.

**Will the parish hall remain?**

Sadly, the parish hall was condemned after a Health and Safety visit in February 2020. You may remember our notes about this at the time, as we updated all parishioners. There is so much wrong with it, and it would cost more to put right than to start afresh. As you’ll see in the plans, it will be demolished; the space allows for car parking after the new building to the church and parish centre.

**Why narrow the parish centre? Why not keep the additional “club” part of the centre?**

Again, it is about the suitability of the building; the extension to the parish centre has not stood the test of time in the way that the main building has. The construction also affects the ability to use the upper level of the hall. There is another consideration here as well; whatever is developed on the land of Number 1 Park End Road will need a buffer between it and the parish centre; to take away the extension area will therefore benefit the building, and give that additional buffer space.

**Will there be a bar/club in the new centre?**

There will not. To run a licensed premises is to completely change the character and use of the centre, and presents many complexities. We can readily obtain a temporary licence to serve alcohol at parish socials.

**How will it all be paid for?**

As mentioned in the letter with the plans, we are very fortunate to have land with good value at Number 1 Park End Road. It is our intention to fully fund the project from the development of that land. Though we do, of course, always welcome donations.

**What is the timescale?**

There are a few hurdles to overcome; once plans are amended after this consultation we need a sign off from Historic Churches, and a Planning Application with Havering Council, as well as further agreements at the Diocese. We will keep you updated about progress, but a possible start date is May 2021; if we start then, we may finish in early 2022. **There will be further consultation as we go along** – most especially about fixtures and fittings in the newly refurbished parish centre. And at any time, with any question, please email or phone using the details on the back page.

**Do you have the plans for the development of 1 Park End Road?**

Not yet – they have not been started. The land is parish land, and the parish will get the value from it. However, the Diocesan Trustees need to decide whether to sell the land, or for the Diocese to be the ones to develop and lease it. The outcome of that decision affects what will be built on the land. We are part of those conversations, and we have made clear that any new building should not be too imposing, as it is so near the parish centre and church. It is our preference for flats to be built that can be used in a way which fits our mission – for example, flats that could be leased specifically for those teaching in our Catholic schools – but achieving this is complicated. As the thoughts and conversations progress, we will keep you updated, and where possible we will consult with the whole parish, in a similar way to this consultation.

**How do I tell you what I think?**

The best way is **a note, letter or email**; letters can be put through the presbytery letterbox; emails can be sent to Romford@dioceseofbrentwood.org. You are also welcome to email Fr Dominic personally, if you have a point which you wish to be confidential – frdominic@dioceseofbrentwood.org. If this consultation is to be meaningful, you must be able to write and speak freely; please share these plans with family members and friends who have moved away from the parish. Everyone’s comments are welcome. If you like what you see, it matters that you tell us – a simple one line “Well done, I love it!” is fine! If you want us to start again, then that is fine too. And if you have little suggestions – why not move a door to there, or add in this or that facility – that all helps.

**The simplest way to comment could be to tell us: “What I love about these plans is ...” and “What I would most like to change about the plans is …” Every comment matters.**

**Please offer your thoughts and comments on or before Wednesday 4th November.**

Above all, please keep it in prayer. This is a “once in a generation” project, and it needs all the prayerful help we can give it.

**THANK YOU for your time in reading all this – we look forward to hearing your views.**

**The full set of detailed plans are on the parish website,** [**www.stedwards-romford.org.uk**](http://www.stedwards-romford.org.uk)

**They will also be printed very large and available in the parish hall on the weekends of 24th/25th October and 31st October/1st November, as well as on Wednesday 28th October and Wednesday 4th November, after the 12.15pm Mass. You will need to view them in a “socially distanced” way, and we will have stewards to help with that.**

**Finally, they will also be available along the pathways at the entrance to St Peter’s school, for parents as they pick up / drop off children before and after half term.**