

ST. FRANCIS CATHOLIC PARISH NEWSLETTER

21st March 2021 Fifth Sunday of Lent (B)

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Parish Priest: Fr. Liam Gallagher

Assistant Priests: Fr. Damian Esene, Fr Simon Peter Lubulwa

Deacon: Rev. Ian Black

Parish Office hours: 10am – 12 noon Monday and Friday (email or telephone only)

Catholic Schools

St Francis Primary School: Queen's Road, Maidstone, ME16 0LB 01622 771540

St Simon Stock Secondary School: Oakwood Park, Maidstone, ME16 0JP 01622 754551

MAIDSTONE PARISH HALL DEVELOPMENT

As we all know over the past year many things have had to be put on hold. On the face of it, this may appear to be what has happened to our project to provide the parish with a new hall. We were all prepared 12 months ago to commission demolition contractors to start the next phase of the project in clearing the site, however due to the Covid pandemic this was halted.

In the interim a few of the important factors relating to the project have seen some major changes, which I outline below.

Just to recap however:

Everybody in the parish thought that we had agreed a deal to enable the old classroom block to be refurbished in exchange for the sale of most of the land to a local developer as part of a wider scheme. But, when this scheme was examined by independent bodies, it was deemed that there was sufficient concern over the viability, cost, loss of amenity and sustainability of the project, that in fact it presented an unacceptable risk to the parish to proceed.

Since then, further investigations have revealed a number of points which have to be overcome in order to proceed. Some will be aware that Maidstone Borough Council have in the past few months published their Town Centre Development Plan. When this plan was examined by officers working on behalf of the parish and diocese it was discovered that our site was not considered as part of the plan. This in turn throws up a question regarding the future use and development of the site.

Additionally, the question of affordability and sustainability of a new, or refurbished, parish centre has been examined. The independent reviewers have suggested that the only sensible way forward is to seek to develop the site in conjunction with a partner in a scheme that would be beneficial to both the parish and the local community. However, this again would require the consent and cooperation of the local council to be achieved.