

6 December 2021

Dear Father Gerry & Margaret,

Re. Parish Meeting – 21st November 2021

Thank you for the copy of the notes from the above meeting. I read them with interest and would be grateful if you would consider my observations which are as follows:

It appears that there is a complete lack of structure to the strategic planning discussions that the Parish appears to be rushing its' members through. Indeed, short term solutions (selling the Community Centre to balance the "books") appear to be taking centre stage ahead of defining any clear consensus about overall values, strategies, and objectives. There is a real risk that this lack of clarity of process might result in missed opportunities and loss of engagement.

As a former NHS senior planning manager, I have considerable experience of guiding NHS services through similar strategic planning processes and my first observation would be that a **quality process is not quick**. Further it would involve the following key stages:

1. Defining a **Strategic Vision** – comprising a shared view on mission and values*
2. Setting a **Strategic Direction (5 year plan)***
3. Agreeing a **Business Plan** with objectives (setting out what will be done in Year 1)
4. Producing **Business Cases** in support of individual projects outlined in the business plan e.g., Development of the Community Centre

*The current Diocesan Synodality process could easily be adapted to deliver these

Furthermore, when it comes to producing a **Business Case** it would be usual to **define a set of benefits criteria** (derived from the Strategic Vision), **generate a range of options** (by brainstorming as a group and always including "do nothing") and **evaluate the cost/benefit/risk profile of each option** before reaching a final decision.

In the NHS it would be usual for this type of process to be independently facilitated such that no one voice dominated what should be an "all-stakeholder" process.

My observation, therefore, is that the Parish is currently trying to "kill too many birds with one stone" and risking any meaningful outcome as a result. You will note from the above that Business Case development for individual projects comes at the end of the planning process, not the beginning as is currently happening. I would therefore, strongly urge the Parish Council to slow the current process down, concentrate on doing stages 1 and 2 well and in line with Diocesan timetables and in the meantime (subject to bridging finance for the Community Centre being available) initiating work on the likely requirements of a future business case for the Community Centre e.g., investigating letting/management options, considering a range of development opportunities.

I would be grateful if these comments could be shared with the Parish Council and with next week's Parish Meeting (12th December)

I would also suggest they are shared with the Diocese for their views and suggestions

Thank you
Lisa Cooper
MB ChB. MBA

c.c. Margaret Swift
Bruce Thomson

14 November 2021

Dear Father Gerry,

Re. St Anne's Community Centre

Further to your article in this weeks' Parish Newsletter and your presentation at Mass today I would be grateful if my views, as set out below, could be taken into consideration in the discussions about the future of the Community Centre:

- In principle I object to "selling the family silver". It can only be sold once whilst it can be used many times. This is a momentous decision that the Parish should be directed to make not in the light of short-term personal inconvenience or financial pressures but against a background of intergenerational justice (responsibility to those who bequeathed the asset to us and to those who come after us). It would be wrong to bring this discussion to the Parish before every attempt has been made to use the asset for its original purpose. I would need to be convinced that every such attempt had been made before entering further discussion and I am sure that bodies like the Charities Commission would need similar reassurance should any future project be put before them.
- If the case for "selling the silver" is made, then legal ownership needs to be established. Does the Parish own the asset or could the School or even the Presentation Sisters have a claim? In Fairfield the proceeds from the sale of a Church of England school went into a Trust to benefit the education of local children in the Parish. Could such a claim be made here, and might there be wider local vs diocesan claims on proceeds from the sale of the asset?
- I strongly object to use of sacred church space for community facilities. The side aisle is used regularly and by reducing church capacity there is a danger of creating a "self-fulfilling prophesy" regarding falling church attendance. I think it would be a tragedy to reconfigure the Church in this way and I do not support this element of the plan.
- The Parish needs to be aware of the local PR implications of taking a town facility such as the Community Centre out of action particularly at a time when it has only very recently benefitted from a large local

donation to refurbish it. If the RC Church chooses to simply bulldoze the Centre (and I can't believe that conversion to apartments is a viable option) then it won't be long until somebody points out that the £100K that Tarmac donated from its community fund could have been used for other locally deserving community projects. There is further a congregational PR issue – why was Bruce Thomson and team allowed to dedicate a large proportion of their lives to the Community Centre refurbishment when sale was on the horizon? And what is the impact on future volunteers when they have witnessed what has happened to Bruce?

- Should it be decided that the Community Centre be developed into residential accommodation then I would suggest that a development such as St Anne's House (Buxton Parish, C of E) where Parish facilities along with "alms-type" housing are provided together would be a preferred model rather than sale to a private developer. Further I understand that the Buxton Parish model was agreed on a lease arrangement in which the assets revert to the Parish after 75 years. This might lessen the impact on the "family silver"
- Finally, it is my view that car parking for the Church, Community Centre and any residential accommodation needs careful consideration. This would not have been addressed by the Outline Planning Application but could become a significant challenge in taking any project forwards.

I am sorry if I appear negative, but I do feel this is a momentous decision for the Parish that it will be left with the legacy of for a long time to come. It is important therefore, that all important considerations are taken into account, and I hope that I have been helpful in highlighting some of them.

John will be attending the meeting on the 21st. I do not intend to be there but hope it goes well and that my views as outlined might be considered.

Yours Sincerely
Lisa Cooper

c.c. Margaret Swift – Margaret please can you share with the Parish Council?
Bruce Thomson