

The Parish of St Joseph's and the English Martyrs Bishop's Stortford

Report from the St Joseph's Project Team re Joint Build of a new Parish Centre with St Michael's - June 2010

It would take a very long chronicle to give parishioners a real understanding – not only of what has been accomplished here – but more interestingly, precisely what has been necessary to get to this point in the development of this Project – for it has been far from a straight forward undertaking.

So - for the sake of brevity we'll stick to the framework of events but we'll be happy to enlarge on any matter or issue that parishioners wish to raise at the Parish AGM.

Back in early 2006, when it became known that St Michael's had received permission to build a new PC in the Old Monastery grounds, Canon Eddie was approached by the then small team reviewing the options to resolve the Apton Road Centre problems and other Parishioners and it was agreed that we should approach St Michael's to see if they would agree to us joining them in developing a Joint Centre.

At that point they already had Planning Approval for their project. Fortunately they agreed to enter negotiations.

Each and every aspect of the Joint Build Project since then has been a battle - from

- The initial negotiations with St Michael's, through the additional land acquisition negotiations with Mr David Harris and Bishop's Stortford Town Council.
- Very supportive negotiations with the Redemptorist Trustees over Restrictive Covenants.
- The much-laboured Planning Application process with East Herts DC.
- Overcoming tree issues with the help of specialist reports from a highly-skilled Arborist.
- Negotiating access routes to the building site itself with the Old Monastery owners/occupants.

And all this alongside

- The designing of the building.
- Detailed Building specification for submission to prospective contractors.
- Tender reviews.
- Selection of the contractor and the awarding of the contract.
- Obtaining the Agreement and support of the Trustees of the Diocese of Westminster and St Alban's.

More recently the negotiations over utility trench routes and the St Joseph's Phase 1 'Fit-Out' have thrown up yet more complications to be ironed out.

But in the year since the last AGM the highlights can be summarised as:

- Building started on site on 24 August 2009
- With the then completion date planned for 25 June 2010

- All went well in early stages with no costly unexpected surprises in the foundation digs etc. (apart from the need to shore up the Apton Road Day Centre ancient wall – at our cost!)

The severe winter weather impact that you will all recall has led to:-

- A revised completion date 23 July 2010.
- So far we are about on Budget with the build Contract.
- We have had to split the St Joseph's 'Fit-Out' into 3 Phases to fit with a budget authorised in negotiations with the Parish Finance Committee.
- Phase 1 is being actively progressed and should all be in place for on completion of the build phase on 23 July. We expect to be within the Budget!!
- Phases 2 & 3 will be progressed depending on the continued positive response to the Fund-Raising Appeals.
- The 'Vision' is intact but will take time to fully realise beyond our obtaining possession of the building.
- Sale of the old Parish Centre in Apton Road has been progressing alongside the build project and completion of the sale should follow shortly after the new building is handed over to us. Even here we faced problems on the discovery of Japanese Knotweed which has not prevented the sale but has resulted in a relatively small reduction in price. The net sale proceeds are somewhat less than was envisaged when we started out on the Project of replacing the old centre – Credit Crisis impact - and this has led to the need for a larger and wider programme of raising additional funds. The negotiations with the Diocese of Westminster for a bridging loan were completed prior to committing to any of the Contract. But at least through the net sale proceeds of the old Parish Centre and together with the generosity of the Redemptorists who, on their departure in 1994, gave the retained land/buildings to the Parish via donation to the Trustees of the Diocese of Westminster, the repayment of the bridging loan will be possible.
- In addition to the building project - the team also negotiated and completed a "Collaboration Agreement" with St Michael's that also required the agreement and signature of the respective Trustees of the Diocese of Westminster and St Alban's.
- A separate "Management Agreement" governing the future running of the Joint Centre is about to be finalised and this sets out the detail of the responsibilities of a joint Management Committee made up of equal numbers of St Michael's and St Joseph's parishioners with the position of Chairman being shared on an annual basis by the Rector of St Michael's and the Parish Priest of St Joseph's.
- It is envisaged that an additional St Joseph's Parish Centre Committee will need to be established to take responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the St Joseph's facilities.

So there you have it.

Let's hope for and look forward to many years of functional 21st century facilities which should enhance the experience of all parishioners of St Joseph's and visitors to our Parish as well as the significant opportunity for a ground-breaking collaboration relationship with St Michael's.

Tony Barrance, Chairman of St Joseph's and St Michael's Joint Build Committee

We will be very happy to answer any questions at the AGM or at any other time.