

The Catholic Community Of Golborne, Lowton & Croft

Served by the parishes of All Saints, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Lewis

Context of the Trustees Decision

When Fr. Ron Johnson was appointed as Parish Priest of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Lewis in September 2009, he raised concerns about the state of the building fabric in both churches but the more immediate and serious problems were recognised to be on the St. Catherine of Siena site.

The presbytery was declared unfit for use and he spent several months commuting between his family home and the parish. During this time discussions took place with the surveyors employed by the Trustees of the Archdiocese. At that time the diocese decided that the presbytery had to have work done on it to enable the Parish Priest to take up residence in the Parish. As St. Catherine's Parish did not have funds available to undertake the necessary work a grant was arranged for the full amount from the "poor parishes fund" .

Over the two years that have followed, a programme of investigation has taken place to discover the full extent of the problems on St Catherine's site, before carrying out any further major repairs.

The need to reveal the full picture...

Parishioners have been informed by Fr. Johnson about the state of the buildings and the financial state of the Parish from the beginning, although attempts have been made not to cause unnecessary concern, especially in the light of unfounded rumours that circulated in the wake of earlier discussions about the future.

Once the surveyors had been given an opportunity to consider the situation a full Quinquennial Building Inspection Report was ordered. This report, which took place in Autumn term of 2010 highlighted over a £100,000 worth of works, but it also recommended further investigation works, including a full electrical report.

Over the past few months some of these reports have been progressed.

The Electrical Installation

The electrical installation at St. Catherine of Siena Church consists of the original wiring from when the Church was built in 1959; although it has been added to over the years, it has not been replaced. This was identified in a report prepared for the parish in 2005 and was highlighted as a cause for concern. Attempts were made to gain an inspection report in the spring term this year but in the end a visual inspection confirmed the findings of that earlier report and it was felt that a full Mechanical and Electrical Condition Survey needed to be carried out. This was done on the 20th July 2011.

This inspection concluded that ***"the condition of the electrical services within the Church and Hall areas have been highlighted in previous electrical periodic inspection reports as being unsatisfactory, which is further emphasised by this report. Therefore, the electrical services as they currently stand render the building unfit for public use."***

Trustees decision...

In the light of this report the Trustees had no choice but to act on the advice given and close the doors of the Church and Hall on health and safety grounds.

At present no longer-term decisions have been made about the Church or Parish, but going forward this will need to be addressed.

The current budget cost...

To keep the building open, the report proposed a complete rewire of Church and Hall and the installation of a new fire and security alarm system, together with works to upgrade the mechanical installation, at a budget cost of £71,700.

In addition to the electrical and mechanical works highlighted, works include, but are not limited to...

repairs to the Church roof and Tower

replacement/repairs of windows in the Church, Hall and Presbytery

replacement of roof lights

works to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act

replacement of the boundary fence and relaying of external flag pavement areas

remedial works to areas of damp, dry lining, redecoration, re-pointing and refurbishment of Church and Hall

a complete re-pointing of the presbytery...

If everything that needs doing was done the budget cost currently stand at £368,087.00.

This includes further investigations on the structural integrity of the building which has as yet unquantified range of additional costs.

Going Forward...

There are three possible outcomes from the current situation.

- 1) ***A diocesan loan is obtained and Trustee approval is given for the works to be carried on the current buildings.***
- 2) ***A diocesan loan is obtained and Trustee approval is given for a new building to be built with lower running costs.***
- 3) ***A decision is made by the Archbishop to close the church permanently and make provision within the cluster for Mass and the Sacraments.***

For the Trustees, and indeed for local discussions, the facts and figures of the building reports for St. Catherine of Siena Parish must also be considered against the background of other reports prepared for All Saints (costs unknown at this time) and St. Lewis (estimated to be £108,250).

Ultimately, and most concerning, it must be considered against a backdrop of falling numbers attending mass in each of the 3 parishes on a regular basis.

It must also be considered against the backdrop of falling numbers of priests and the reality that in the near future 1 priest will be serving the 3 parishes although this is less important than the fall in mass attendance.

As a Church Community and Archdiocesan Family we would not want our decisions driven by financial concerns, but in the current climate financial matters cannot be ignored and are but one of the factors that ultimately influence all Pastoral Area planning.

Fundraising...

If option 1) or 2) is given approval then a programme of fundraising will have to be introduced and well supported but it does not seem appropriate to begin that fundraising now and raise expectations until the longer-term decisions have been made by the Archbishop.

To give an idea of the scale of fundraising needed... Over the past five years St. Catherine's Parish has not been able to meet the day to day expenses on the donations it has received and so if all the work that has already been assessed was given approval ***we would need to raise an extra £500 per week every week for the next 14.9 years to repay the loan necessary... or in short nearly doubling our current weekly collections! In addition there would be added costs for All Saints and St Lewis to be funded.***