

St Francis Parish Council Meeting

Wednesday 21st May 2014 at 7.30pm

Requested Amended Minutes

Present: Fr. Tom Taaffe, Tony Berkeley, Sue Roche, Val Grieve, Mary Looney, Peter Hermon, Wyn Vickers, Wendy Cullen, Paul Goldsborough, Mary Stewart, Michael O'Sullivan, Collette Heppolette, Louisa Aubrey, Mary Kennedy, Alexander Kennedy, Christine Birkhead.

A prayer was read by all present.

No minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th October 2013 were discussed or approved.

Chairman's Report: TB had prepared a hand out of Parish Co-coordinators' Reports which he circulated.

Item 1. New Chair to Be Elected for next three years.

TB announced to the Parish Council that he would be stepping down as Chairperson as he had completed three years. On behalf of the Parish Council Fr. Tom thanked Tony for his work and contributions to the Parish.

A note advertising the vacant position will be advertised on the Parish Website, in the Newsletter, and on Noticeboards, and the Parish Community will be informed of the vacancy at Mass. Nominations will be invited. Interested parties will be able to come forward and offer their services. Some discussion took place about the need for a Parish Council, and its purpose. Fr. Tom stated that primarily the Parish Council is to assist the Parish Priest in the spiritual development of the Parish Community, and his main concerns are the spiritual needs of the parishioners. All are welcome to join in all Parish Council meetings "in Council"

The Co-ordinators within the Parish Council, who were originally elected by the Parishioners, should now review their positions. Members of their Activity Groups should be consulted, as to whether existing coordinators continue, or the Groups' nominate replacement representation on the Council.

The aforementioned announcements will be made at Mass, so as to involve the Parish, and a letter will be sent to all members of the Parish Council.

Fr. Tom explained that in order to comply with both Civil law and Cannon law, Peter Hermon, as representative of the Finance Committee would be required to be a member of the Council, and Val Grieve (Safeguarding) represented the Church's commitment to Safeguarding, and would also be required to be a member. Furthermore, the School Head Teacher would also need to be a member of the Council as the School is a Parish School.

Item 2. Parish Building Update

Despite the Agenda item being listed as above, a wide ranging debate ensued about the viability of the proposed Parish Centre. There was considerable concern expressed about the project and the on-going financial implications. PH explained that the Parish was already in debt by over £200 000 incurred as a result of the vital Church refurbishment undertaken in 2013. The loan that the Parish had obtained from the Diocese was interest free, but the debt had to be repaid. PG asked if/when fundraising would start.

The whole idea of a Parish Centre was called into question even if funds were to become available. CH, LA and a number of others felt that in line with the spirit of Pope Francis, any funds could be better used for the poor, the needy or some Charitable Fund or Training Project. It was suggested that these ideas could be put to the Parish as alternative Options to a Parish Centre, and parishioners given the opportunity to make a choice.

PH and PG expressed the view that the original Census Questionnaire....

“Do you agree in principle with the proposed Parish Centre project? YES/ NO “

was biased, leading Parishioners to a “Yes” Vote. A number of attendees agreed with these views, and felt that the question was loaded, badly constructed and of little value.

Fr. Tom pointed out that although a decision in principle had been received from the Parish Census in December 2011, this did not constitute approval to go ahead. It was simply the start of the process of consultation. A great many changes had taken place in the last three years. The matter would be referred back to Parishioners in an open and transparent manner when the sale of the land in North Ascot was clarified one way or another, but added that this land disposal was not a straightforward matter.

Further concern was expressed about the organisational implications of running a Parish Centre, funding the required staff, and other cost implications. Fr. Tom said that some of these issues had started to be addressed in a paper that had been produced.

A brief reference was made to the “Study undertaken in order to help consider the proposed Parish Community Centre”, and PG who had not seen the paper was handed a copy by VG during the meeting.

A lengthy discussion ensued about the land in North Ascot; the significant problems encountered surrounding its disposal, and the structural relationship that existed between the Parish and the Diocese in relation to the sale. Fr. Tom explained that Offers had been made and passed to the Diocese who considered that the land was worth more. A Charity had made a recent offer. The PP went on to explain that if the land is sold, a sum of money arising from the sale will be due to be paid to the Crown Estate.

The Bishops view that the Parish should proceed with a Parish Centre was also questioned, and Fr. Tom explained that such a project came under the umbrella of the New Evangelisation, thereby explaining the Bishop's support for it. Some felt that simply repaying the debt was the only sensible consideration at present. All else should be shelved.

The Parish Priest further stated that he had not been approached by the School for monies since arriving in the Parish. He attributed this to good financial management and fundraising by the School, but pointed out that should monies be required for essential school maintenance then this would become a priority.

It was stated by TB that The Friary is also in need of considerable repair and upgrading.

Fr. Tom referred to the decrease in the number of Parish Priests, and the consequent increase in shared Parishes. There was a question about whether a Priest would be in residence at the Friary in years to come, and the implications of rebuilding or upgrading the Friary were touched upon. However, the Bishop has apparently stated that there will be a resident PP at the Parish in future.

Item 3. Fr. Tom's points from the Bishop's visit

This item was not discussed, as it seemed that time had run out.

The way forward

If monies become available from the sale of the land in North Ascot within the future, the Parish Community will be informed of the details at the earliest opportunity, and the information will be made available in a special Leaflet, on the Parish Noticeboard and on the Parish Website.

Further to amending the Draft Minutes, and noting the comments contained within recent emails from some of those in attendance, the PP has decided that Parishioners will be given the opportunity of forming a small working group, who will explore avenues and ideas that are in keeping with the spirit of St Francis, our Patron, and in line with the current Pontificate. The group will be invited to compile a short list of Options. One of these Options will be a Parish Community Centre.

Subsequently, Parishioners will be invited to make their preferred choice. Within this context it is hoped and anticipated that we will revisit the proposal in a wholly democratic manner, while remaining mindful of the spirituality of our Patron St Francis of Assisi and his way of life.

The meeting concluded without reference to any other business.

Could all members of the Parish Council who represent groups discuss representation on the Parish Council from October onwards. If you are stepping down as representative could you please let me know by the end of August who your new representative is. The first task

of the Parish Council in October will be to elect the Chair of the Parish Council. The whole Parish is invited to nominate for the Chair. We also need a Minutes Secretary who will not be a member of the Parish Council.

Could I ask you to ensure that all names listed above receive a copy of these requested amended minutes and indeed anyone else who wishes to read them.

Fr. Tom Taaffe
Parish Priest