



St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

serving Westerham, Brasted, Sundridge and Ide Hill

Parish Room Project

Bulletin 3

15th August 2015



This is the third bulletin to be circulated to parishioners to inform them of progress being made with the Parish Room Project. It had originally been hoped that by this time the Parish Room might have been under construction, but unfortunately consideration of the planning application submitted in early February has been protracted. There have been several false dawns, but we now have a clear timetable to reaching a conclusion and for this to be positive we need as much of your support as possible and your prayers, please.

In the second bulletin issued in May, we said that Sevenoaks District Council had suggested that, if we attached the Parish Room to the presbytery, the planning application would be more likely to be acceptable as an infill building in the green belt. Subsequently, they have indicated that the best chance of gaining planning permission is by submitting an amendment to the planning application based on “Very Special Circumstances”. Consequently, this is what we have done with the original design unchanged, and an “Amended Consultation” has now commenced. All those who previously wrote to Sevenoaks District in support of the application will have been advised by letter of this.

There are two key dates relating to the Amended Consultation. The first key date is 27th August when at 9.30 am, Westerham Town Council (WTC), will consider our amendment. You may recall that WTC objected to our original application and we understand that this has been the reason for delay to its determination. It is, therefore, very important that we do everything we can to get WTC’s support to our “Very Special Circumstances” amendment and you can help to do this in two ways. The first is for people, particularly those living in Westerham, to write to WTC before the meeting and the second is for as many as possible to attend the meeting at 9.30 am on Thursday 27th August in WTC’s offices., Russell House, Market Square, Westerham.

The second key date is 1st September which is Sevenoaks District Council (SDC)’s last date for receiving comments on the “Very Special Circumstances” amendment, and we would like everybody to write to SDC supporting the amendment please, even if you wrote in support of the original application.

The “Very Special Circumstances” amendment document is lodged on SDC’s website under the St John the Baptist Parish Room planning application. It focusses on the key reasons why the Parish Room is so important to our Catholic community and so, if you do write to either WTC or SDC in support, please could you emphasise the reasons why the Parish Room is so important to us and why alternative facilities are not suitable.

As a guide, the key “Very Special Circumstances” which you might consider using are as follows:

- The parish has a thriving community and weekend Mass attendance has increased from about 60 to 150 in the past 3 years with strong support from the local community and this growth needs to be nurtured by having adequate facilities if it is to be sustained.**
- The parish has an increasing number of activities including educational activities, meetings and social gatherings for which the church building is not a suitable venue as it a place of worship and is not configured for educational or other purposes as it is filled with very heavy pews.**
- The presbytery is a family home for the priest, his wife and two children. It only has space and facilities for accommodating a very few people in its modestly sized sitting/dining room. The numbers wishing to use it have exceeded its capacity.**
- The presbytery does not have adequate facilities and is not accessible for the elderly or disabled. It only has toilets in the upstairs bathrooms.**
- Most of the activities for which the Parish Room is needed are linked to church services and, therefore, need to be held in close proximity to the church.**
- A key example for the need for the Parish Room is children’s Sunday School which is held for about half an hour during Mass while parents are in the church. With the increasing numbers of children attending (now sometimes exceeding 20), the presbytery can no longer accommodate them and going to a different location would be impossible.**

- Currently, there is nowhere for social gatherings to be held after church services. For those attending Sunday Mass or special services such as Baptisms, First Communion and Funerals, being able to meet afterwards is important and this is currently not possible without a Parish Room.
- Some of the meetings held in the presbytery are of a confidential nature, and in such a small dwelling with family members present, privacy is not possible.
- The circumstances leading to the planning application are unique within Westerham; a “one-off” given that other two churches in Westerham already have the facilities being sought.

Your support in writing to Westerham Town Council before 27th August can be sent either by letter to Russell House, Barleys Meadow, Market Square, Westerham, Kent TN16 1RB or by email to office@westerhamtowncouncil.gov.uk or by accessing the website at: <http://www.westerhamtowncouncil.gov.uk/contact/> and using the form provided for on line comments. Whichever method you use it is important that you include your name, full address and refer to the St John the Baptist Church Planning Parish Room Planning Application (**reference: SE/15/00367/FUL**).

Your support in writing to Sevenoaks District Council before 1st September can be sent by letter to Planning Department, Sevenoaks District Council, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HG or by email to planning.comments@sevenoaks.gov.uk or by accessing the website at: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications and selecting **Public Access for Planning** quoting the planning application reference number and using the form provided for on line comments. Again, whichever method you use it is important that you include your name, full address and refer to the St John the Baptist Church Planning Parish Room Planning Application (**reference: SE/15/00367/FUL**).

Thank you for all your support, prayers and patience. We are determined to succeed. Please help us to do so by expressing your views to the authorities as to why the Parish Room is so important for our thriving community.