



PYMBLE CATHOLIC PARISH

SACRED HEART & OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR

Dear Parishioners,

Thank you to those of you who were able to attend the Parish forum on 24 March 2021 regarding potential development of the Parish site at Sacred Heart, Pymble. I would like to share with you the feedback received, outline how you might provide any further feedback and the next steps in this important project.

First it may be helpful to set out a little history for those who were not able to attend the forum.

History

The Parish has spent many years attempting to ascertain an appropriate way of developing part of the land on the Sacred Heart site at Pymble. There have been several attempts to determine an appropriate development, with preliminary due diligence and discussions held with both childcare (2016) and aged care providers (2011).

It was agreed in early February 2019 that the Diocese would provide assistance to the Parish to progress the planning and by late May 2019, the Parish had established a Parish Development Committee (PDC) to drive the project forward and provide advice/direction for me as Parish Priest. Members of the committee include me, Mary Hor (School Principal, Sacred Heart Primary), certain PFC members, representatives from the Diocese and Parishioners. The PDC keeps both the Parish Finance Committee and the Parish Pastoral Council well informed.

I advised the PDC that the parcel of land under consideration for development would be two rectangular blocks (or a combination) as set out in the image below, along the Bobbin Head Road and northern boundaries of the site.



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There are a couple of key issues affecting the site.

- **The site is zoned SP2 – Educational Establishment.** Under the Ku-ring-gai Local Environment Plan 2015 this zoning is restrictive and would generally allow only development which is for “education purposes”. It is possible that childcare would be permitted with consent but other development, say for residential/aged care would require a lengthy and expensive Planning Proposal to change the zoning of the relevant site.
- **Parking/traffic considerations including “Kiss and Drop” for the school**
Safe and efficient parking/kiss and drop arrangements (currently operating along Bobbin Head Road, part of the proposed development site) is a very important issue for the school community. The site earmarked for development is adjacent to the current kiss and drop zone – works will be required to ensure appropriate turning circle/traffic flow is achieved once the site is no longer available for Parish use.

One aspect which has been clearly confirmed is that a **sale** of the property is not an option at this point; retaining our property assets is a way of maintaining our security well into the future. Given this, any proposed arrangement will involve a **long-term lease** of the land (approx. 99 years), which would see the land returned to the Parish at its conclusion.

With a view to an eventual Expression of Interest (**EOI**) campaign (through which interest for the site is sought), the Diocese recommended that an external real estate agent or adviser would be best placed to be able to achieve maximum value for the site. An externally managed process would also be preferable to a self-managed campaign for probity reasons.

In addition, the Diocese recommended that the Parish not restrict the EOI to any particular use, but rather that the net be cast more broadly to ensure any potential interest in the site is captured. It is hoped that a more general EOI campaign will help ascertain interest and possibilities not otherwise considered by the Parish or its committees.

In August 2019, the Parish appointed Charter Keck Cramer (Property Advisers) (**Charter**) to undertake the due diligence and preparatory work for an eventual EOI campaign, if approved by the Parish after consultation. As part of its work, Charter called for proposals from several real estate agents and those proposals were received towards the end of 2019. No real estate agent has yet been appointed.

The Covid-19 pandemic took hold, effectively halting work on this project for almost the whole of 2020. Now that life has almost returned to normal, we are back on track to progress this important initiative.

The Discernment Process

The steps involved in the process include undertaking due diligence, seeking expert advice to help us discern our future, continuing to consult with our parish community and seek feedback along the way, responding to queries and any concerns and providing a sense of timing.

Importantly, I would like to reassure everyone that there is ample opportunity to provide input and feedback.

While appreciating there has been some historic planning considered, the purpose of our forum held in March 2021 was to progress our collective reflection and discernment regarding:

1. Our future and the sustainability of the Parish.
2. The development opportunity for consideration in the context of our parish needs and requirements centred on our Mission and vision.
3. Possible next steps and timing for consideration – including the appointment of real estate agents to engage in an EOI campaign to secure proposals for the site.

4. An invitation for parishioner input to help formulate our direction and decisions, in particular **to confirm they are prepared to support the PDC to engage real estate agents to conduct an EOI campaign for the identified site.**

Parish Mission and Vision

Emma McDonald (Diocesan Financial Administrator) advised us at the forum that the first step for us as a Parish in discerning our future requirements and development options, was the need to consider together our Parish vision and mission and what our Parish needs might be as a result.

This provides me the opportunity to share with you again our Parish Mission and Vision, as presented by Jo Burdajewicz at the forum.

Our Mission is:

To proclaim the gospel faithfully, to bring the Light of Christ to our community and to form our people in the traditions of the Catholic Church and the holy scriptures.

Our Vision is:

To build a Christ-centred community of Love and Mercy.

Response to the Parish Consultation Forum on 24 March 2021 – overall reflections

There was a clear majority of responses during the forum favouring the exploration of development on the site in support of our Mission and to assist the parish with its operating expenses over the coming years. Many of you indicated your support for the process which will assist us to secure both our spiritual and financial sustainability well into the future.

Participants were keen to understand the expertise of those who have been assisting the Parish with this project – Emma McDonald outlined for us her vast experience in managing and assisting Parishes with property development projects over many years, as well as highlighting some current examples such as the Epping and Naremburn projects. Charter Keck Cramer have been appointed as property advisers to the Parish and are well versed in working with and for Church to achieve excellent outcomes. They provide an excellent link between Parish and eventual interested parties with their understanding of property and commercial arrangements.

People also emphasised the need to ensure that a suitable “partner” (developer) be found to ensure that whatever might be developed on the site will fit with the activities of the Parish considering especially our Sacred Heart Primary School, which is a vital part of our Parish. Emma explained to us that there is a careful assessment of any proposals received from the EOI campaign which will involve the PFC, the PDC, Charter and the Diocese. The party with the highest monetary offer is not necessarily the best candidate for the development and much care is taken to secure an appropriate long-term lessee.

Some challenges and concerns raised are also acknowledged and appreciated - namely understanding the process and steps involved, understanding the nature of long-term leasing and what a development might look like, safeguards the Parish will need to implement as a result and the fact that this project alone may not be sufficient to secure the financial viability of the Parish for the future. There will be continued opportunity to discuss and discern in greater detail throughout this process and the Diocese will provide continued support to the parish as we travel this road.

In summary, through the feedback from the Parish Finance Committee members, PDC members and initial Parishioner feedback, the key needs identified include:

- The land is **not** for sale and the land proposed for development will not change before the EOI campaign;
- Although the likely end use for the land will not be known until after the EOI campaign has run, the successful party should be a reasonable fit with the Parish/school and other activities onsite – this is not only a financial decision;

- Being clear about what happens at the end of the 99-year Lease period and requirements in relation to the “return” of the land to the Parish;
- Ensuring that the returns for the project go entirely to the parish, to be used as determined by the Parish Finance Committee as adviser to me as Parish priest.

I am mindful of your feedback and the desire to protect our Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour centres while ensuring both benefit from the returns of this project. The future of our Parish hinges on the retention of two centres/churches and its two schools; both equally relevant and important in our decision-making process, as they are important parts of our Pymble Parish Community

Due diligence and independent advice

Engaging with you and inviting your input is one part of the process. Just as critical is undertaking some preliminary due diligence and market analysis.

Some preliminary investigative work was undertaken at the time of the earlier development attempts by the parish. This work has been used to assist with understanding the development restrictions and challenges so that they can be presented to the Parish for consideration.

This work, along with the preliminary information received from real estate agents, helps us to identify and confirm the future development potential and associated financial value. Unfortunately, it is clear that there will be no guarantees until the EOI process has been completed – it is only then that we will have an understanding of the “value” of the site and potential returns to the parish.

I assure you that from my perspective, the Parish will not be committing itself to any definite course of action until the options have been thoroughly considered and the Parish has had time to consider and discuss them.

Next Steps - process

1. **Continued Parish Consultation** - ongoing consultation and discernment is crucial. I will endeavour to keep you informed through a variety of ways, sometimes via the Parish bulletin, at or after Mass, one on one meetings – all throughout the various stages of the process.

Should anyone like to meet with myself and a Diocesan representative, please don't hesitate to be in touch with the Parish office via email at info@pymblecatholicparish.org.au or by phone on **9144 2702** so we can arrange a time.

2. **PDC and experts** – the PDC will continue to meet; members are also available for your feedback. The PDC comprises myself, Peter Lenehan, Adam Bowe, Amal Wahab, Roman Pazniewski, Peter Meers, Elaine Oei, Mary Hor and Sue Host. The PDC will also be supported by the Parish's appointed experts and members of the Diocese.
3. **Engaging the Market** – based on the information provided at the forum and via other channels, it is now envisaged that property consultant experts will be appointed to represent the Parish in engaging the market more widely through an **Expression of Interest Campaign** to determine development interest in the site. It is at this point that possible options could be presented to the Parish for consideration.
4. **Needs assessment** - As part of this process, it is very important to ensure we determine our Parish needs as an initial step – what are your hopes for the life of your Parish? I invite you to complete the Parish Needs Assessment which can be found at the entrances of both Churches and on our Parish website at: www.tinyurl.com/9kxk5e8j

In engaging the market it will assist in:

- Determining actual interest in the site.
- Identifying potential development interest.

- Identifying possible uses for the land for the Parish's consideration.

I remain most grateful to members of my Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Committee in providing me guidance and advice as well as to all of you for your shared interest, enthusiasm and strong desire to sustain our wonderful Parish well into the future.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Boguslaw Loska".

Fr Boguslaw Loska

Parish Priest