

# Options for the Future of St Vincent's, Solly Street Sheffield

Report to the Parish by the Solly Street Committee

6<sup>th</sup> November 2008



Picture of St Vincent's published subject to GNU Free Documentation License

## **Introduction**

### **The Solly Street Site**

1. The Parish “owns” the old St Vincent’s church, the school and other buildings at Solly Street in the centre of Sheffield.

### **The Solly Street Committee**

2. In 2005 Fr Paddy established the Solly Street Committee to explore the options and to make recommendations for the future of the site. The Committee includes members of the Parish, representatives of Hallam Diocese and Fr Paddy.

### **The Committee’s Work**

3. Committee members have been involved in many activities in exploring the future of the site. These have included:
  - Workshops and dialogue to gauge opinion in the Parish;
  - A bid for substantial funds from the National Lottery in partnership with a local community organisation based in Netherthorpe;
  - A Chartered Surveyor’s report on the condition of the Church and likely cost of repairs to prevent further deterioration;
  - Meetings and discussions with planners from Sheffield City Council’s City Development team; and
  - Approaches to the Trustees of the Diocese, the University of Sheffield, the University Chaplaincy and other organisations concerning the future of the site
4. This report presents the Committee’s findings arising from all its work so far, from the Parish Meetings in June 2008 and from the written replies to the Questionnaire. It offers a positive “next chapter” arising from an approach by the St Vincent de Paul Society, details of which appear in the report.
5. We are sending a copy of this report to Fr Paddy and to the Diocesan Trustees.
6. If you have any questions about this report, please contact Fr Paddy or any member of the Committee - Peter Kinch, John Rigby, Frances Cuning, Dennis Gerrard, Anne Shepherd, Ed Whittaker and Tom Garrud.

## **Since the Parish Meetings in June 2008**

7. We have considered the views expressed at the Parish Meetings on 11 and 14 June. We have also considered the 70 written responses to the Consultation Questionnaire. (A brief summary of the responses appears on page 5. Please remember that they represent an important part of the consultation process, but not a vote).
8. In doing so, we have searched for a positive outcome – one that reflects our faith in action and enables the Parish to remain faithful to its Christian values and heritage. This broad aim has been shared by everyone who has contributed to the consultation.
9. However, we have not found a consensus as to what the future of the site should be. The debate in the Parish (and in the Committee) has reflected this – discussions have been passionate and sometimes polarised. Moving and persuasive arguments have been offered in favour of the different options – with proponents on all sides using the history, heritage and values of the Parish to support their views.
10. We thank all of you who have contributed your views and we are especially grateful for the efforts many of you have made to ensure that the Parish has remained a friendly, open and cohesive Christian community throughout.

### **Different views on the future of the site**

11. The summary on page 5 shows that many responses were in favour of keeping and developing the site. The responses included many positive suggestions for possible redevelopment and future uses of the site. Some were unlikely to meet the key criteria of being achievable, viable financially, sustainable and permitted. Others had already been explored - it would have been helpful if the consultation document had included more information about our work in this respect, and we apologise for this omission.
12. The summary on page 5 also shows that many other responses preferred to sell the site and use the proceeds of sale for Parish and charitable purposes. These responses persuaded us that selling the site would neither be a failure nor an abdication. Selling would bring many serious responsibilities – it would require care and commitment to ensure that the proceeds of sale were used to further the aims of the Parish and to continue the Vincentian ethos.
13. We also agree with those who suggested that further investigation work might be helpful, provided that any such investigation work is carried out professionally and within acceptable financial constraints.

### **Proposal from the SVP**

14. With this last point in mind, we are delighted to report on a proposal received from the SVP (St Vincent de Paul Society (England & Wales)). Details are set out on page 6. In brief, the SVP have asked for time to carry out a feasibility study on the possibility of redeveloping the site and putting it back into some form of effective use.

15. As many Parishioners will know, the SVP has a wonderful history of delivering needs-based community services. They have developed and managed large scale community projects before. Their successes include bail hostels (approved and funded by the Home Office), debt-counselling services, furniture stores and many other services.
16. They also have the resources, the expertise, the management infrastructure and above all the enthusiasm to bring their vision to reality. They also have experience (far exceeding our own) with a range of funding options that have the potential to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.
17. Their interest in viable and sustainable projects means that they will be realistic and practical – their plan for producing a feasibility study includes appointing a development team and a project manager. They have also indicated that they will welcome our input on the scope of the feasibility study and the future use and management of the site.
18. In short, we believe that the SVP proposal offers:
  - a) a vision that fits with the views of many Parishioners and is consistent with the Vincentian ethos;
  - b) sensible suggestions for exploring the possibilities realistically;
  - c) a vision that may well be achievable, viable financially, sustainable, and permitted by civil / canon law;
  - d) opportunities for those, including CMS, who want to maintain a presence in the Solly Street area;
  - e) opportunities for those who wish to use our financial resources for Parish and charitable purposes;
  - f) the only currently realistic alternative to sale of the site; and
  - g) an outcome that is as positive as any that we could have hoped for.

### **Recommendation**

19. Accordingly, we recommend that:
  - a) Fr Paddy should accept the SVP's request for a one year period to prepare a feasibility study on the future use of the site; and
  - b) the Parish / Diocese should make every effort to agree terms with the SVP for their long term use of the site.
20. We hope and pray that the SVP will be successful. We urge everyone in the Parish and the Diocese to offer their support. This will give the venture every chance of success. We will be working closely with the SVP over the coming year to forge a real partnership and to negotiate a positive outcome.

# Consultation Summary

This is a brief summary of the 70 questionnaire responses from individuals and groups.

## 1) Rank the options.

*The preferred options were:*

<i>Option 1 – Keep &amp; Develop</i>	<i>34 (3 without names)</i>
<i>Option 2 – Lease/sell to charity</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Option 3 - Sell part</i>	<i>5 (1 without name)</i>
<i>Option 4 – Sell whole site</i>	<i>29 (1 without name)</i>

*One respondent expressed no preference.*

*The full rankings have been made available to Fr Paddy.*

## 2) How should we use the site if Option A is chosen?

*Specific suggestions included a car park, a home for CMS, a place for worship, secure homes for elderly and retired clergy, and a soft play area and family café.*

## 3) In relation to Option B, which charities should we approach about using the site?

*Suggestions included St Vincent's, St Wilfred's, the CMS, CAFOD and Life. Other ideas were the University Chaplaincy, the Duke of Norfolk, Camelot and sheltered housing.*

## 4) If we sell part of the site (Option C), what uses do you propose for the parts of the site that we keep?

*Suggestions included the CMS, the Boxing Club, a car park and Housing*

## 5) If we sell all or part of the site (Options C or D), do you want any restrictions on the use of the site by future owners? If yes, please specify.

*Most of those in favour of selling the site rejected the idea of restrictions on future use. Others suggested "Catholic" uses only, a prohibition on gambling, and no shopping centres.*

## 6) If we sell all or part of the site (Options C or D), do you have any specific proposals as to how we should use the proceeds of sale?

- a) Those for keeping the site tended to want to support CMS.*
- b) Those in favour of sale tended to want improvements to the church and facilities at Pickmere Road.*
- c) A range of other charitable opportunities for the Parish to put its faith into action*

## 7) Any other comments?

- a) Many of those in favour of sale want CMS to make more use of St Vincent's Pickmere Road*
- b) Poor time to sell*
- c) Need for more research*

## The SVP Proposal

1. The SVP made a presentation to the Solly Street Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2008. Those involved in the presentation included local members, the Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Executive and the National President.
2. The presentation reflected a vision of a Vincentian community on the Solly Street site delivering needs-based community services. These might include core SVP activities, counselling services, training and community facilities, and other possible uses including a place of worship. (A copy of the presentation will be put onto the Parish website)
3. To achieve their vision, the SVP envisages:
  - a) agreeing a long lease at a peppercorn rent;
  - b) developing the car park as an income stream for the SVP and the Parish;
  - c) improving the condition of the site and its value as a long-term asset of the Parish
  - d) attracting funding for the development of the site; and
  - e) managing the site as a sustainable operation in line with our common Vincentian ethos.
4. The SVP suggests several steps towards this vision:
  - a) The Parish's agreement in principle to proceed.
  - b) The appointment of a Development Team (which will include at least one Parish representative).
  - c) A one year period for the SVP to make a comprehensive feasibility study.
  - d) A formal decision to grant the SVP a long lease
  - e) A Development Phase of 2 years followed by the formal launch of the project.
5. We have asked the SVP to agree the terms of reference of the feasibility study with us, to accept two representatives on the Development Team, to report regularly on progress, to report in writing on their final view, and to let us have a copy of the feasibility study.