**Batley, St Mary's**
**Contextual paper in connection with the planning application for the demolition of former convent, part of the former school and a residential Development.**

## Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of how the Catholic Church and its parishes are structured and respond to comments made that suggests the Diocese of Leeds and the Parish of St Mary's Batley has deliberately neglected the former convent and school buildings. These comments have been made by planning authority officers as a consequence of a planning application made to Kirklees MDC to demolish the former convent and part former school and residential development.

### Background

The Leeds Diocesan Trust, is a registered charity with the registration number 249404. The sole Trustee of the Charity is a trust corporation, the Diocese of Leeds Trustee, company registration number 2886244. The Diocese consists of 76 Parishes (110 churches), in West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, the East Riding of Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire. The Diocese also has 92 Catholic Schools, Academies and Colleges.

The diocese is restricted in how it manages and uses charitable assets and funds. All decisions and transactions must be for the benefit of the objects of the charity.

The diocese is divided in to parishes, which cover distinct geographical areas. All property is registered to the Diocese of Leeds Trustee (the charity) and property is held on trust for each its individual parishes in accordance with Canon Law. In Canon Law each parish is a separate juridical body within the diocesan family. In the diocesan consolidated accounts each parish is treated as a Designated Fund. Each parish must manage its own income and expenditure and be financially sustainable. The former school and convent are assets of St Mary of the Angel Parish, Cross Bank Street, Batley. St Mary's Voluntary Academy is also an asset of the parish, as is the Parish Centre on Melton Street.

### History

The former school, now subject of the planning application was considered in poor condition in the 1990's and no longer fit for Educational use. In 2001 this accommodation was closed and the current St Mary's Academy was extended to accommodate key stage 1 and nursery children from the closed Victorian building. Whilst the building was in use by the Voluntary Aided Maintained School, the Department for Education, Local Education Authority (Kirklees MDC) and the parish were responsible for the maintenance of the property. Once the school had vacated the former school buildings all responsibility fell to the parish. For clarity, the parish took responsibility of a building in 2001 already in poor condition.
As a Voluntary Aided (VA) School legislation dictates all capital expenditure to a VA School attracts a financial liability from the building owner; the parish. In 2001 this contribution was 15%. So not only did the parish take on responsibility for the vacant building it also contributed heavily to its replacement.

In a similar vein the former convent was occupied for many decades by the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, a religious order founded in Ireland. The Order occupied the property and maintained it as best they could until they vacated in 2012/13. Once again another unmaintained property was

returned to the responsibility of the parish. Due to the condition and school safeguarding implications it was not deemed appropriate to relet the property.

Despite considerable attempts to secure the school, nursery, and convent buildings the parish struggled to keep up with the constant negative attention the vacant buildings attracted. This attention resulted in an arson attack on the nursey building. Permission was granted by Kirklees MDC to demolish the nursery in 2022.

The West Yorkshire Police log of calls to these vacant properties is extensive.

**Parish Statistics**

Parishes funds are heavily reliant on Mass offertory (plate collections), donations and legacies. Understandably, Mass attendance is therefore the main driver of parish income. Below is a simple table of weekly Mass attendances. This shows a considerable decline in Mass attendance since the turn of the millennium.

| year | Mass weekly attendance |
|---|---|
| 2000 | 615 |
| 2009 | 425 |
| 2017 | 256 |
| 2023 | 240 |

The parish have invested heavily in its property over the past 20 years considerably greater than its annual offertory income. The parish reserves have now been depleted. Recent repairs to the Grade II Listed Church have relied heavily of external grants. Unfortunately, grant support for places of worship have declined in recent years with more emphasis on community use.

**Parish Finances**

At the rear of this paper is a summary of projects (in excess of £5k) and the associated costs incurred by the parish. In summary the Parish have invested £364k on the church, presbytery, former convent and former school buildings and £204k in support of an overall capital investment of £1.65m in the current school buildings.

Over the last 5 financial years St Mary's Parish have made an operating loss of between £5,715 - £35,492, an average loss of £24.5k pa. At the financial year ending 31 March 2023 the parish had a negative balance of £160,524.

In the period whilst the convent had been vacant Kirklees MDC was at its peak charging a premium 300% Council Tax rating. This was costing the parish c. £15k per year. The Valuation Office Agency have since agreed to remove the property from the VOA Register.

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The Diocese of Leeds Trustee is working very closely with the parish on a strategy to help manage the current position and bring about financial stability to the parish. The demolition of the former school and convent which is central to this strategy will considerably reduce the ongoing operational costs associated with holding these properties. The residential development will generate a capital receipt for the parish that should eliminate the debt and hopefully provide sufficient funds to refurbish that section of the school to be retained and provide some funds to continue to maintain the Grade II Listed Church and Presbytery.

The proposal to demolish the former school and convent is not intended to generate profit, but is planned to support the future of the parish and its Grade II church.

K Anderson
**Diocesan Property Administrator**
3 September 2024

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**Parish expenditure on church and associated buildings**

| Year | Description | Cost |
|---|---|---|
| 2001 | Security boarding vacant (school) | £6,000 |
| 2002 | Demolition of temporary (block) | £15,000 |
| 2008 | Convent repairs | £56,000 |
| 2009 | New church Heating | £45,000 |
| 2014 | Repairs to Cross bank Street Boundary Wall | £28,000 |
| 2015 | Church Roof Repairs | £87,000 |
| 2016 | Withdrawn planning application | £32,000 |
| 2017 | Church ceiling repairs | £76,000 |
| 2022 | Demolition of Fire Damaged Nursery | £21,000 |
| | | |
| | **total** | **£366,000** |

**Parish Expenditure associated with its capital liability for school projects**

| Year | Description | Cost | Parish Liability |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2000 | Key stage 1 and nursery extension | £774,000 | £116,000 |
| 2001 | Replacement windows | £15,000 | £2,300 |
| 2002 | Replacement windows | £72,000 | £7,200 |
| 2003 | Repairs to caretakers House | £19,000 | £1,900 |
| 2004 | ICT Suite / CCTV | £103,000 | £10,300 |
| 2005 | Replacement kitchen | £75,000 | £7,500 |
| 2006 | Alterations and roof repairs | £67,000 | £6,700 |
| 2007 | Toilets and fire alarm | £62,000 | £6,200 |
| 2008 | Cloakroom and toilet extension | £84,000 | £8,400 |
| 2009 | SEN Refurb | £57,000 | £5,700 |
| 2010 | Key stage 2 toilet extension | £41,000 | £4,100 |
| 2011 | Playground improvements | £22,000 | £2,200 |
| 2013 | Rewire phase 1 | £92,000 | £9,200 |
| 2014 | Rewire phase 2 | £64,000 | £6,400 |
| 2015 | Replacement boiler | £90,000 | £9,000 |
| 2017 | Floor coverings | £10,000 | £1,000 |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | **total** | **£1,647,000** | **£204,100** |

NB.

- The above does not include a substantial number of small cost items, as these are not monitored
- St Mary's Primary school converted to Academy Status in 2021. No parish liability beyond this date
- These costs do not include c. £45k in fees associated with planning applications for the demolition of the former school and convent.
- All information in the tables can be evidenced on request.