

## St Michael's Consultation Meeting – Monday 4th August 2025

Meeting was led by:

- Monsignor Philip Inch, Episcopal Vicar for Pastoral Organisation and Synod Implementation.
- Martin Miller, COO.
- Kirk Williams, Senior Surveyor.

The meeting began with prayer, which flowed into an overview of the finances of the archdiocese, namely that:

- The Archdiocese is operating with an annual deficit of 12 million pounds.
- The COVID19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on finance across the Archdiocese, the effects of which are still being felt.
- In 7 years, there will be 46 priests under 65yrs, serving across 133 parishes and 161 churches. This means priests need to be cared for.

The Archdiocesan process regarding St. Michael's has been thus far:

- The Parish reported to the Pastoral Organisation Sub Committee (POSC) for their consideration.
- The proposal of the POSC was then shared with the Finance Committee for further consideration. At this stage the Finance Committee asked for wider consideration to be applied.
- The Trustees then met and took into account all that had been shared. They too asked for wider consideration to be applied. They also requested an Architectural and Historical Report to be compiled by a heritage expert. This was recently completed.
- The parishioners are consulted and their opinions are being noted.
- After the consultation process, the Archbishop will consult again with the Trustees and the Council of Priests and then make his decision.

The Finance Committee asked the Surveyor's Department for an up to date Quinquennial Inspection Report. This is completed. Kirk then summarised the report, categorising as follows:

1. Immediate work
2. Unknowns (when work begins and this reveals additional unexpected work is required).
3. Works within the next 18 months
4. Works within 5 years

Total estimated building costs for St Michael's church is £2,132,889

The presbytery works are estimated at £37,000.

All these estimated costs do not include VAT.

The meeting then opened the floor to the question '**Is St Michael's Church essential for the Mission of the Church in Widnes?**'

Comments received from the floor:

- Mass attendance is growing steadily in the last 5 years. Church is used by a school and a nursing home.

- We became one parish 10 years ago. We have cut the fat already – why do we have to suffer more?
- St Michael's School and Care Home have good use of the church.
- Leaving Safe Harbours identified St Michael's Church as serving Halebank/Ditton & Hale. It is coming up to 150 years anniversary of St Michael's in 2029, in 1979 it was the 100yr anniversary of St Michael's and parishioners raised £40K. Leave some hope. Make 2029 a target for fund raising.
- No resident priest. St Michael's centre closed
- Lots going wrong in the area. Bank closed, pubs & café closed
- OLPS closed.
- All very well funding raising but how will it be maintained? St Michael's is a large building.
- St Michael's is like a mini cathedral. Can we not sell St Basil's?
- It's a Grade II\* listed building. Can we not apply for help from English Heritage?
- St Michael's is a key location at one end of the town which provides an alternative to St Bede's. What is essential about St Basil's?
- Why can't the money received from the sale of St Michael's Centre & OLPS be used for St Michael's Church?
- Positive – more young people coming to Church on a Sunday. We may get more vocations.
- What timescale are we looking at?
- It is not possible to endure another winter without heating in the church.
- Concern over covenanted land at St Michael's?
- Houses being built all around bring in families.
- St Michael's is essential as a beacon of hope for Ditton, Halebank & Hale.
- The indices of poverty are high in the area around St Michael's.
- There were 135 First Communions across the whole parish in 2025. Is there a short sightedness in the archdiocese? Are we to turn Christians away because there is not enough room?
- As a parish we are flourishing, not surviving.
- So many people give of their time.
- Yes, St Michael's is essential, but why not apply for lottery or heritage fund?
- Is there a possibility of representatives of the parish to speak to the Trustees, and Archbishop?
- If St Michael's closed, what would happen to the significant works of art of religious significance?
- St Michael's is very important in the faith of the children in the parish of St Wilfrid's.
- Invest in lay leadership recognising the vocation of all the baptised.
- Monies received from sale of properties go into St Wilfrid's parish account, not to the Archdiocese.
- The next stage are the two further consultation meetings on the 17<sup>th</sup> August and 4<sup>th</sup> September. All comments and suggestions will then be forwarded to Mgr. Philip Inch who will report to the Trustee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September and consult with the Council of Priest on the 16<sup>th</sup> October. After this, a decision will be made by the Archbishop.

The meeting ended with prayer.