

**Catholic Parish of West Malling and Snodland
St Thomas More Church, Lucks Hill, West Malling**

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27th January 2020

Dear Archbishop Wilson,

We write in reply to your letter dated 20th December 2019. You will appreciate that your letter has had a profound and devastating effect on our Catholic community here in West Malling, and this was reflected in the numbers attending our recent meeting.

At this time, we feel very hurt and are struggling to come to terms with all the consequences and implications of your proposal to sell the St Thomas More site here at West Malling. We are fully aware of the ongoing structural and maintenance issues that affect The Hermitage. These have always been beyond the means and financial capacity of St Thomas More parishioners.

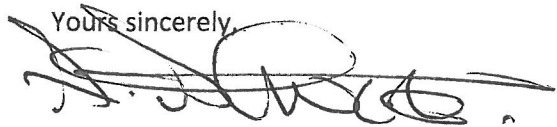
To sell the whole site does allow for flexibility and financial gain from a development perspective. However, the need for these are only some aspects when making this decision.

We would ask you to consider an alternative proposal of retaining our church within its current grounds and the St Thomas of Canterbury Pre-school (stable block) where we would seek to establish the priest's accommodation and office, either within the church grounds or attached to the stable block. We also seek to retain the stable block as this is a major integral component of our community. We are passionate about this building because of the recent refurbishment to provide pre-school, baby and toddler group and children's liturgy facilities. Many sacrifices were made, including the sale of St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Snodland combined with fundraising in excess of £100,000 which has enabled us to renovate and use the building. The purpose of this was to provide a succession of future generations of Catholics in our area and we consider it an integral part of our community.

Our church has been the focal point of our faith community since 1972 and this is where we come in communion not only with God but with one another. Over the years we have established a growing Catholic presence within West Malling and surrounding areas, and we are now a close and vibrant community and fully committed to our church and one another.

We feel by selling the church, our community will be irreparably damaged and will fracture, therefore we kindly ask you, to come to West Malling and meet with us, which would allow us to make representation and discuss our future with you in person. To allay these fears and anxieties regarding our future we request a meeting with you as soon as practicable.

Yours sincerely,



Adrian Atmore. J.P.

For and on behalf of St. Thomas More Parish, West Malling, Kent.

Encl.

Appendix 1

Reasons for retaining St. Thomas More Parish buildings

The St Thomas More Church, The St Thomas of Canterbury Pre-school and More Park Primary School are located together, in one area. These connections are invaluable as they provide continuing activity and growth within the catholic community. Without the church and pre-school, we fear that the cycle of future generations of catholic worshippers would be broken.

We are an active and vibrant parish for all age groups and are providing worship, sacraments and engagement through the following groups:

- Sacramental groups, such as first reconciliation and communion, confirmation and bereavement, Eucharistic ministers, readers, musicians and welcomers. We have a large team of altar servers (adults, boys, girls). Children's liturgy team.
- Open parish meetings.
- Monthly area groups meetings, where Lent and Advent masses are said in homes.
- Adoration team. Stations of the cross.
- Churches together representatives.
- Donate8 scheme – encouraging parishioners to volunteer eight hours work to the parish each year.
- APF Missio team.
- Gardening club, flower arrangers, church cleaners and other working and social groups.
- Friendship group. Baby and toddler group.
- Safeguarding team, health and safety, finance and buildings groups.
- Junior and senior youth groups.
- Fundraising team. Twice yearly fundraising in collaboration with More Park Primary School. Parish and PTA co-ordinated events throughout the year.

Our parish database comprises of 1020 families, but this figure is not an accurate figure of our parish, as many non-catholics are involved and engaged in our community.

Further housing developments of 1700 homes are being proposed in our area and our church is needed as a focal point for spiritual and pastoral care.

Our church is open and available every day for prayer, mass, (which is attended by school children each week), communion service and adoration, to a diverse community.

The church is well established within the area and in a state of good repair. The church car park is also used twice a day during weekdays, term time to drop off and pick up school children. This allows for the safety of the children.

We have a well-established catholic presence over a large area of central Kent, with the church used for deanery confirmations, meetings and training, and ecumenical services and other collaborations.