



18 November 2021

Dear Parishioners of St Thomas's Lewisham,

Many of you would be aware of the history of the parish's convent at 40A Thomas Street. A number of older parishioners have told me that ideas of developing the vacant land next to the convent have been in circulation for at least two decades. Having actively investigated the possibilities for the last 6 years, I now have some grasp of the complexities involved!

A thorough review of the possibilities for development of the land has shown without doubt that the only permissible development of the land is subdivision and erection of single dwellings on separate blocks. I am told that re-zoning applications would be highly unlikely to succeed, but in any case, a study of the best use of the land from a financial perspective indicated a residential development.

It should be said at the outset that the convent itself is considered to be an important part of the heritage of the parish and that any plan to develop the large adjacent land would necessarily include preservation of the convent and ensuring that it was not adversely impacted by any development. This was a point made by the Inner West Council when I sat down to discuss with them what might be permissible development in March 2019.

Parishioners will also be aware that there are many trees on the property. Any development of the land we proposed would necessarily require the removal of some of these trees, but it would also require the preservation of a number of the more significant ones and the replacement of most of the trees that were removed.

Quinn O'Hanlon architects have been extremely helpful to us in successfully project managing the restoration of St Thomas's Church, which they did on budget and on time, to the great satisfaction of everyone. Happily, QOH have also been extremely helpful in developing a detailed proposal for the building of four houses on the convent land. This proposal has been fully sensitive to the Inner West Council's exacting requirements, and so we are confident that the proposal we have now developed would not meet any substantial objection from them.

Attached you will find an overview plan of the proposed development. Note that the buildings have not been rendered in detail on these drawings, only the footprint and position on the land of the buildings.

Apart from the obvious substantial rental income that these dwellings could provide to the parish, there are also possible mission benefits to the parish from having these properties. Frequenters of the 10:30am Sunday mass will note that there are frequently a good number of young adults in attendance. In large measure, this pleasing result has been achieved through the spruiking of the parish by the three young men who have formed an intentional Catholic household in the parish in a model known as a "Frassati" house.

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati was made a patron saint of youth by Pope St John Paul II and has featured heavily in World Youth Day celebrations. Young men in a number of places in the world, taking inspiration from him, have sought to live together in households that emphasise prayer and works of evangelization of their peers. Despite COVID parishioners will note that there has been some noticeable success of this venture at St Thomas's Lewisham.

Apart from a house of such a kind forming in one of these residences, there are a number of larger Catholic families, some of them parishioners, who are heavily involved in parish life contributing volunteering efforts

to the liturgy as readers, servers and choristers, and performing other important but hidden duties that keep a parish running, such as providing hospitality for parish events, laundering the altar linens and more besides. Often these larger Catholic families, although a boon to any parish who has them, can find that landlords are unsympathetic to their larger number and they can have real difficulty in finding stable rental accommodation.



One or more of such families living in our parish would be a real blessing to the parish, even if a discount were given on rent to make living in Lewisham more affordable.

Since the licensing of the parish's schools and presbytery to Sydney Catholic Schools the parish has not had a building that would be suitable as a presbytery for a resident priest or priests. While the convent might become a presbytery, with only "half" a priest at present, it would be a rather over large building for one resident! The provision of a number of houses on the parish land would provide the possibility in the future of one of the residences being designated a presbytery such that Lewisham parish might once again have a resident priest or priests.

Parishioners who are able to recall the days of the Immaculata community in the parish convent will remember the considerable life and apostolic activity that the community was able to generate in the parish. Having a number of residential facilities available to the parish for its use would give us the potential to recapture that energy for the renewal of the parish. It is my dearest hope that we might be able to bring that about in order to have once again, although perhaps in a somewhat different way than previously, a thriving and apostolic parish which provides spiritual nourishment and a spiritual home to a great host of people from the Inner West of Sydney.

My thanks go especially to my finance council members of the last few years who have assisted me with their advice and support in developing this proposal. They are: Gary Greinke and Victor Garcia as well as Margaret McGrath and more recently Paul and Ruth Holtz. In our most recent meeting, the current fully costed proposal was put before them, and enthusiastically received and supported. Now that we have a proposal which we believe will be robust enough to withstand public scrutiny, I have decided to present it to the parishioners for their comment. I hope that this proposal, which is the work of many years, will meet with your enthusiastic endorsement. **I welcome the comments, questions and hopefully expressions of support of St Thomas's parishioners for this project.**

At present I am in the process of preparing the paperwork required to give the Archbishop a detailed, fully costed proposal to carry out this plan. My work over the years with the Archdiocesan authorities leads me to expect that he will grant his permission to proceed. Assuming that we do indeed receive that approval, the next step will be to have QOH Architects prepare a Development Application for Inner West Council, which I would hope to present to them for their consideration as early as possible next year.

I entrust this project to the powerful intercession of Our Lady Help of Christians, and to St Thomas of Canterbury, praying that they will guide and assist us in finding a path to the successful completion of this project and obtaining for us not only the expected financial benefits, but also the looked for spiritual and apostolic benefits as well.

I have included a brief FAQ section in this document to clearly answer some of the most obvious questions you may have in the short term.

Yours in Christ Our Lord

Fr Sam Lynch
Parish Priest



FAQS

Why don't we build a multi-story or unit block instead? What about other options?

Town planning advice has made it clear that a multi-story development of residential units, some kind of aged care facility, or another kind of development, such as a childcare development are all impermissible under the zoning laws in place. The only permissible development of the land is subdivision and erection of single dwellings on separate blocks.

Can we fit more dwellings/blocks on the land?

The Council's concerns about amenity, tree preservation, the impact on the existing convent and other concerns have been taken into account, reducing the proposed development to only four dwellings.

What happens to the existing trees?

After significant consultation with an arborist, some of the existing trees will be removed and replaced once building works have been completed. Other trees will be preserved on the site and protected during building works. The importance of several of the trees to the local community has been taken into account and has meant a reduction in the size of the proposed development to four dwellings.

What happens to the convent?

As stipulated by the Inner West Council, the convent itself is considered to be an important part of the heritage of the parish and the local area and that any plan to develop the large adjacent land would necessarily include preservation of the convent and ensuring that it was not adversely impacted by any development.

Who will live in the dwellings once they are built?

There are several ideas that are being considered at present: having a Frassati house; renting to local Parishioners; perhaps retaining one dwelling as a Presbytery. The plan is not to sell any of the dwellings, but rather to generate ongoing rental income for the Parish from them.

How long will it take to build?

We have consulted extensively with Council and related parties during the planning process in the hope of expediting the approvals and build phase. While no one can predict how long the Council will take to approve the plans, we anticipate that from lodgment of the plans (hopefully early 2022), through to completion would be under 18 months.

How do I provide my feedback on the project?

You can email Father Sam directly at priest@thomaspatrick.org.au



CATHOLIC PARISHES OF
ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY LEWISHAM & ST PATRICK'S SUMMER HILL



Image 1: Birds eye view of the new dwellings (blue) and details of trees being retained, and new trees added.

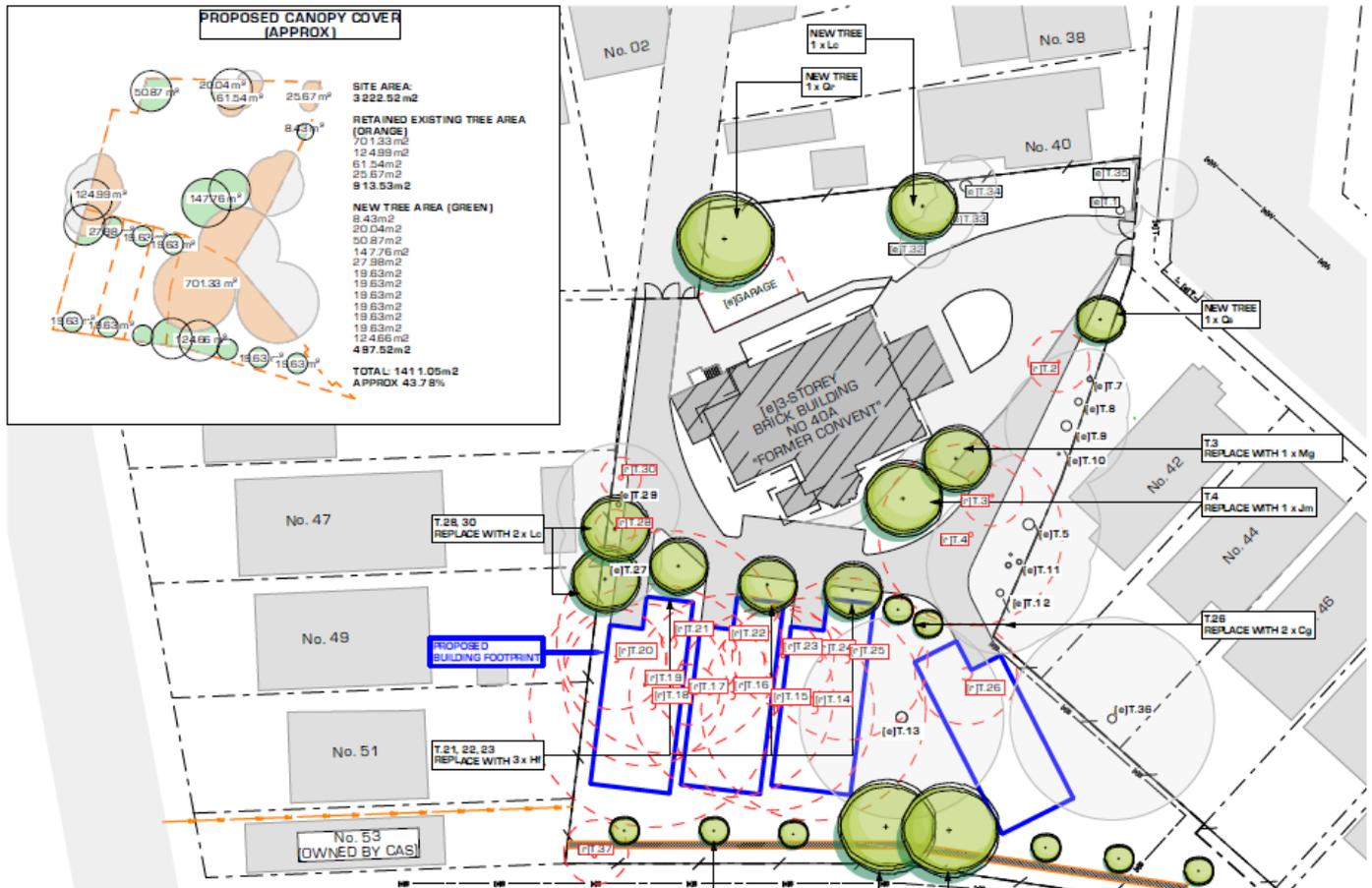


Image 2: 3-D image of the how the new dwellings will sit in relation to the existing Convent building.

