

We have now moved into the building phase, but the project history is still here, so that you can read in Alastair's words about the trials, tribulations, successes and joys of a project like this

February 2012

I have previously used the analogy in describing this project of a swan gliding serenely whilst there was frantic paddling going on beneath the surface. Well the poor swan has now done a couple of sidesteps and a glorious pirouette before triumphantly reaching its first goal. On Monday 13 February we finally completed the sale of the old chapel to Foye Estates and thus completed the first stage of our three stage relocation project.

The second stage, the purchase of the land at Blackfriars is being progressed by our solicitor Fitz who has encountered a number of irritations which have slowed things down - if you want to see grown men cry ask Fitz or me to elaborate. No- please don't! The purchase is progressing but is taking a lot longer than anyone expected. It's all in the detail.

But we are pressing on with Stage 3 - the new building, our Emmanuel Centre. Roger Langham and his team are finalising the design and then he will be able to give us a 'walk through' of the building on computer so that we can begin to see what it will feel like when it's built.

Our fund raising letters have all been sent - that's about 40 organisations that we have asked to consider us for a grant and we shall hear back from them over the next few months. Meanwhile we were awarded a total of no less than £81,000 by three central Methodist organisations, which was way above our expectations

May 2012

All I will say about the purchase of the Blackfriars site is, yes, I am very disappointed that we still do not have the final land purchase contract signed. Fitz is 'cranking the legal handle' for all he is worth, but this is a three way process with Methodist HQ legal people also involved. Rest assured that we will let you know just as soon as we can when the formalities are concluded.

At the end of April we appointed our Employers Agent and CDM Co-ordinator - Lawson Queay of Uckfield. This gives us professional Chartered Surveyor assistance to advise us and to oversee all the technical aspects of the Emmanuel Centre building contracts and the build itself, including preparation of the project plan, managing clients and third parties, producing tender documents and contract administration. A Construction Design and Management (CDM) Co-ordinator is essential under the CDM Regulations 2007 for any project that lasts more than 30 days/500 person days and ensures proper management of a building site.

We have asked Roger Langham, our architect, to prepare our application for full planning permission for The Emmanuel Centre. This is based on the 'fly-around' that has been showing on a computer for several Sundays in the Senlac and at the annual town meeting with the most recent views of how the inside will look. This is nearly ready to go.

The feedback I have had on the building design and appearance has been very positive and I am confident that we can look forward to a building that will both delight and inspire us and the people of Battle and area. A comment was made at the Town Meeting that this was the most important new project in Battle since the market site redevelopment!

I don't want to tempt fate by talking about timescales at this point, but I hope to be able to give you a good idea of what will happen and when by the end of June.

July 2012

It was a special day when we received news of a £50,000 grant award from a national charity which wishes to remain anonymous. This was followed up soon afterwards with another £10,000 grant from a local Trust. We are so grateful for this help and confidence in our project. The purchase of the Blackfriars site is SO close. We have the 'green light' from TMCP Manchester and all Fitz has to do now is to exchange the paperwork with Rother DC and wait two weeks for the trustees at Manchester to sign off their end.

Roger Langham, our architect, has submitted the Final Planning Application and Rother DC has acknowledged its receipt - so another waiting game starts.

We have kick started the contractual process by holding a meeting with Daniel Salmon of Lawson Queay, our agents and I intend to write down the key events and liaise with Manchester to ask at what stages they will need to be consulted/give approvals. After this it may be possible to create a reasonably firm timetable to share with you all.

August 2012

Suddenly the swans of the first three stages are lined up and gliding serenely along! The land at Blackfriars has been purchased from Rother District Council, Final Planning permission has been obtained and tenders to contract to build the Emmanuel Centre have been issued. Right at the end of August a new surprise private donation of £5000 has been gratefully received towards the project.

In granting Planning Permission RDC made the following comment:

REASON FOR GRANTING PERMISSION:

Notwithstanding that the site forms part of a Local Plan allocation for a new school, the Education Authority have advised that this is no longer considered necessary. In the absence of an educational need the site is considered to be appropriate for other community purposes. The proposed development is regarded as an appropriate community use that has an acceptable relationship with nearby dwellings and maintains the character and appearance of the wider landscape of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions could be supported. The proposal is considered to be in compliance with Local Plan Policies GD1 and TR3 and Proposed Submission Core Strategy Policy OSS5.

Late December 2012

It has been a while since the last update but we have been working hard with Daniel Salmon of Lawson Queay (our agents) to get things assessed and decided upon. We have also been looking very hard at our budget and thinking about projected finances over the next five years.

In late October the builders submitted their tenders for the Emmanuel Centre. One tender was close enough to our budget to make it worthwhile opening detailed negotiations on what we could and could not afford. This negotiation is now complete and after discussion with the Project Team we expect to sign a contract with Pinelog in the New Year.

Pinelog will construct a building exactly like the drawings you have seen. Because there are still some uncertainties (such as the cost of connecting us to the gas, water and electric services) we are treating some features as 'extras' which we will add as and when we know we can afford them. A good example is the audiovisual or projector system. We will have all the required wiring installed as part of the build, but the purchase of the projector itself will happen once we know that we have the money available. Disappointingly, our request to Connexion for a further grant to complete our fund raising was turned down. They said they were 'sympathetic' to our request, but did not feel able to help us with our request

for 'between £17k and £67k' – I had phrased it that way as we still don't know exactly how much we need to complete the budget and I thought that they would be able to choose how much they felt able to give us. After discussions with them, I have now resubmitted our application for a sum of £27k. District has again given us their support and I expect a decision during January.

Our application to WARR (Wealden and Rural Rother Partnership) for £40k was successfully submitted and will be considered by their committee in early January. At the moment, we have no other outstanding applications for funds, but if anyone has any ideas on this subject that we might pursue we would be grateful to hear from you!

In essence, things are tight, but its systems go.....

February 2013

To misquote Shakespeare's Richard III, 'Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious spring by recent events'. There is still some way to go, but there have been several encouraging green shoots of late. We are currently finalising the wording of the contract with Pinelog, but they are proceeding with their preparatory work so that we do not lose any time. The large timber frames for the Emmanuel Centre have been scheduled into their factory production run and they have submitted the necessary information to RDC Planning Dept. to settle the conditions that were placed on our planning application. I expect there to be some to-ing and fro-ing on those before all is settled but hopefully there will be no major issues there.

WARR awarded us a £35k grant which left us requiring 'only' £32k to reach our funding target. We had hopes of receiving most of that from Connexion, but they have received so many requests for assistance that they do not feel able to make a decision on our application until May. Fortunately I had arranged a loan from Chapel Aid to cover any shortfall so that we could proceed and if we are turned down in May reluctantly we shall have to use that loan.

There are a number of 'extras' that we may or may not be able to afford, but once we have more certainty about things like connecting the major services (electricity, gas, water) and about the final car park size and surface we will know how many of these extras we can afford.

I feel sure that there will be an opportunity for groups or individuals to make specific donations to ensure that specific features are included.

Finally our fundraising committee (Beryl, Paula and Andrew) is considering new and imaginative ways to raise a bit more money. I'm sure that we can look forward to some interesting ideas!