



19 July 2024

JOINT STATEMENT FROM

Bishop Greg Bennet
Catholic Bishop of Sale

&

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Community Update 3: The Future of Our Lady of Sion Convent and former Sion Campus, Sale.

The Our Lady of Sion Convent building in Sale is a much-loved local landmark with historical and educational significance for Catholics, the Catholic education community, and the broader community in Sale.

In this third update, we want to bring members of St Mary's Parish, St Thomas' Primary School, and other members of the Sale community, up to date about the significant progress that has occurred since August 2023 in the redevelopment of the former Our Lady of Sion Convent site into an exciting, state-of-the-art education facility, serving the mission of the Diocese of Sale.

A significant challenge in the redevelopment planning process is to ensure that the comprehensive renovation of this iconic 125-year-old building will be done in ways that will (a) meet the needs of students and staff in a contemporary educational context, and (b) comply with the more rigorous 21st-century building codes, while still retaining the building's original beauty, grandeur and character. This process requires meticulous planning and sensitive consultation with numerous stakeholders.

The architects and consultants are progressing in the design and preparation works. The Architectural team continues to meet with heritage advisors, specialist engineers and the St Thomas' Primary School community.

There has also been ongoing consultation with the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion to identify how their extensive contribution to Catholic education on this site can be acknowledged and celebrated, to ensure their legacy endures among future generations.

We are happy to announce that, earlier this year, the Victorian Minister for Planning, through the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), granted a planning permit for the proposed works. We can also confirm that we were successful in obtaining a Commonwealth Capital Grant from the Federal Government for the construction of additional new student learning spaces on the site. These proposed education facilities are an essential element of the overall St Thomas' Primary School masterplan and are separate to the redevelopment work on the former Sion Convent building.

While the planning process continues, it is anticipated that work will soon commence to bring the property back to a clean site, as well as beginning some preservation of the former Sion Convent. Community members may see the demolition of some non-heritage and ad-hoc structures that have been identified as being unsuitable as contemporary learning spaces. These buildings are not included in the proposed development masterplan. There will also be some associated groundwork and temporary building maintenance essential to preserving the former Sion Convent building whilst it is in caretaker mode.

While we are excited about the considerable progress that has been made in the past ten months, a great deal of work is still to be done before a definitive announcement can be made to key stakeholders about the approval of the project. Please keep this project, the re-development team, and the St Thomas' Catholic Primary School community, in your prayers.

Background and Timeline:

- November 2020:** The site became vacant following the formal relocation of the Catholic College Sale Junior campus. Many expressed their dreams and hopes for the future use of this treasured local landmark.
- August 2021:** The Bishop of Sale, through his Diocesan Committee chaired by the former Member for Gippsland South and parishioner of St Mary's Cathedral, the Honourable Mr Peter Ryan, began exploring possible uses of the convent building. The Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Ltd (DOSCEL) engaged specialist consultants to explore the possible relocation of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Sale to the Sion Campus site.
- November 2021:** A community survey was undertaken to gather feedback on relocating St Thomas' Catholic Primary School to the Sion Campus site.
- October 2022:** It was announced that through the work of DOSCEL and the Diocesan Committee, consideration would focus on the development of the whole site as a state-of-the-art education facility with the Convent building which includes the Chapel being the centrepiece of the school.
- December 2022:** Early conceptual designs for a Preliminary Proposed Masterplan were developed by a project architect for consideration and assessment.
- January - June 2023:** Extensive investigations continued and a range of consultant specialists including engineers, surveyors and a Heritage Advisor were appointed.
- June 2022:** Preliminary Proposed Masterplan moved to Detailed Design Phase. Architects commenced engagement with Town Planning.
- February 2024:** Planning permit granted by the Minister for Planning through the Department of Transport and Planning
- February 2024:** Commonwealth Government Capital Grant confirmed.

For Project Updates on Our Lady of Sion Convent and Sion Campus go to:

<https://www.doscel.catholic.edu.au/media/sion-campus-update>