



An architect's impressions of how the proposed Gateway project might look when finished

Evangelical church 'super village' plan for Ballymena under threat

An evangelical church's plans for a new 97-acre development on the outskirts of Ballymena could be in jeopardy after planners rejected a supermarket seen as key to the scheme.

Belfast Telegraph - The Gateway project at Ballee would provide a business park, training, social and student housing, a nursing home, a church, hotel and retail premises.

Opponents of the scheme say it will take trade away from the town centre - which is already suffering from low occupancy rates.

Planners carried out a shopping analysis of the town and it is understood the results of their investigation have been central to the recommendation to provisionally refuse part of the application.

Green Pastures, an evangelical church behind the project, applied for permission for a mixed-use hub of businesses on the site including a food superstore, petrol station, drive-thru restaurant, entertainment centre, health centre, taxi office and car parking.

The application attracted 29 objections and one letter of support from the Wright Group. The planners' decision will be put to Ballymena Borough Council next week.

In its reasons for refusal, Planning Service said: "The proposed food superstore element of the

scheme does not meet the locational requirements of the department's planning policy statement 5, 'Retailing and Town Centres', in that it is likely to have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of Ballymena town centre and undermine its comparison and convenience functions.”



An architect's impression of the Gateway project

Planners have approved the remainder of the scheme, including more than 200 houses, a 60-bed hotel and 40-bed nursing home.

A new church and leisure facilities have also been given the provisional go-ahead. A spokeswoman for the church scheme yesterday

said those behind the venture were disappointed with the initial refusal of the superstore plans.

"The Gateway project board welcome the approval and support of the recommended aspects of this project, namely the church building, community buildings and recreation areas and the housing aspect including nursing home, elderly care housing, supported/ independent living housing, special needs housing and student accommodation as well as the training centre, hotel, self-catering accommodation, business and social economy parks and hotel," she said.

"However, we are disappointed with the recommendation for refusal on the foodstore aspect. Retail assessments have indicated that Ballymena town can support a third foodstore and with this aspect comes the provision of hundreds of jobs to locals as well as many financial benefits to the town and borough of Ballymena as a whole.

See - <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/green-pastures-evangelical-church-super-village-plan-for-ballymena-under-threat-as-key-foodhall-is-rejected-30878216.html>

Bishop Eames claimed close contact with loyalist terror groups says file

Less than a month before Robin Eames became the head of the Church of Ireland, he told an NIO

official that he had “close contact” with loyalist terror groups.



Lord Robin Eames

News Letter - The then bishop of Down and Connor met JE McConnell from the NIO's Political Affairs Division on 20 January 1986, at the height of unionist protests against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The following month, the then Bishop Eames would be elected Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. In Mr McConnell's note of the meeting, he reported: "The Bishop claims to have close contact with the Protestant paramilitaries and he expressed concern that they may be preparing for more positive action against the Agreement - he did not go any further

on this point.” And, referring to rumours that Jim Molyneaux may have been on the cusp of retirement, Bishop Eames reportedly said that “he would have difficulties working with Martin Smyth, should he succeed Mr Molyneaux”.

In 2009, Lord Eames jointly produced a report which was rejected after recommending payments to the families of all those killed in the Troubles — including terrorists.

End of an era - Farewell to the oldest National School in Mallow

The oldest National School in Mallow will close its doors for the final time on Friday after more than 170 years in operation.

Irish Independent - The 63 pupils and the teachers at the Church of Ireland Mallow No 1 NS on Shortcastle Street moved to Munster's first Community National School, which opened in Mallow in September.

The Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross Dr Paul Colton visited Mallow No 1 for the final time to take part a series of emotional ceremonies marking the end of an era for the Church of Ireland in Mallow.

The last principal of Mallow No 1 Mary O'Riordan, who will take over the role of principal in the new school, said it was a bittersweet occasion for all those present.

"In many ways the closing of the school is sad for the Church of Ireland community as it signals the end of an era in Mallow," she said.

Catholic first school admissions policies may be illegal

School admissions policies run on a "Catholic first" basis may be in breach of both equality legislation and the Constitution, the State's equality watchdog has been told.

Irish Times -A report commissioned by the [Equality Authority](#) – now part of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) – argues that article 44.2.4 of the Constitution puts an onus on Catholic schools to demonstrate exactly why positive discrimination in admissions is necessary to maintain their ethos.

The report, authored by Fergus Ryan, a lecturer in law at DIT, says: "In relation to the Catholic First policy, there is certainly at the very least a case to be answered that in its potential

application to schools in receipt of state funding, the policy may be in breach of the Constitution . . . by excluding children from state-funded schools on the basis that they intend to exercise a constitutional right not to attend religious instruction therein.”

Article 44.2.4 states that “legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools . . . nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money”.



Minister for Education Jan O'Sullivan aims to speed up process of switching patronage : wants clearer guidelines on how 'standalone' Catholic schools intend to accommodate children of other faiths and none.

This is countered by section 7 of the Equal Status Act 2000, which gives religious-run schools the right to administer admissions policies which protect their ethos.

Mr Ryan says the key point of law is that each school patron, or board of management, must show that it “is not merely desirable [in the eyes of the Catholic Church] but that it is essential to discriminate in order to maintain the school’s ethos”.

Fr [Michael Drumm](#), chairman of [Catholic Schools Partnership](#), the bishops’ education wing, said any suggestion that its admissions policies were unconstitutional were “speculation” in the absence of a test case.

More at -

http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/catholic-first-school-admissions-policies-may-be-illegal-1.2053401?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter

Priest from Belfast in running for peace award

A Belfast-born priest has been shortlisted for this year's Tipperary International Peace Award.

Fr Peter McVerry joins Sr Stanislaus Kennedy and Brother Kevin Crowley on the shortlist, in recognition of their work in combating homelessness in Ireland.

Fr McVerry, who grew up in Newry, today works primarily in Dublin.

He founded the homelessness charity the Peter McVerry Trust in 1983, and received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2014 Pride of Ireland Awards.

A spokesperson for the Tipperary Peace Convention said that the trio are being recognised for their tireless work "with this vulnerable section of society for decades, without little recognition or support".

The winner will be announced in the coming days and a ceremony will be held in Tipperary later this year. Previous winners include former special envoy to Northern Ireland Dr Richard Haass.

Archbishop Martin calls for open debate ahead of Ireland's gay marriage referendum

The Tablet - Open and unhindered debate by all sides of opinion must be heard ahead of May's

referendum in the Republic of Ireland on gay marriage, according to the Archbishop of Armagh, saying that it was a chance for faith groups to put their case.

“We believe we have something to say on the issue of marriage and we would like to be able to say it and to say it freely in the public square,” Archbishop Eamon Martin said.

The 53-year-old Primate of All Ireland said he was calling for a debate “free from insult or injury or hurt to any person whether they be people of a homosexual orientation or people of faith who would oppose change on the grounds that it is essentially redefining marriage”.

Speaking in Armagh, Dr Martin said the Church would like to be able to explain and share the good news about marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman, open to the bearing of children.

He added that it was a prophetic message in today’s “hyper-sexualised world” though he also recognised that it was a message that would not be wholly acceptable to a lot of people. But he said it must still be heard for the common good, and the good of children and society.

Elsewhere, the archbishop said he would be open to the possibility of a national synod for the Irish Church at some point in the future.

Speaking to *The Tablet*, he said that for now “we are listening on the ground, putting in place the new infrastructure for the Church in Ireland”, in a reference to a number of listening processes taking places in Irish dioceses.

With the appointment of up to eight new bishops and more to come, he pointed out that within the next few years almost half the episcopal conference will have changed.

“I think sometimes people look to big national centralised initiatives as if there is going to be a master plan for the Church in Ireland. I smile often when I think of Pope Francis’s lines in *Evangelii Gaudium* where he says, ‘I don’t want you sitting around board room tables like defeated generals dreaming up some massive strategy for change.’” Dr Martin said he would be guided by his fellow bishops but his personal feeling was that “we might be some way off from a big national event; but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be engaging on the ground, as many of these new bishops are already doing all over the country”.

Scottish Churches Housing Action to mark 20-year anniversary

Scottish Churches Housing Action, which brings together 13 Christian denominations and organisations nationwide, with a commitment to ending homelessness, will be 20 years old this month.

The precise anniversary is 17 January 2015, and it will be marked with a service of celebration, challenge and commitment at St Andrew's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Clyde St, in Glasgow at 2.30 pm.

Worship will be led by the Scottish Churches Housing Action associate convener, the Rt Rev Bruce Cameron, and the sermon will be given by Very Rev Dr Andrew McLellan from the Church of Scotland.

Scottish Churches Housing Action has a substantial track record in developing local volunteer-based initiatives such as its recent befriending initiatives for homeless people.

It encourages the development of affordable housing from redundant or under-used church property.

The group also works to increase church and public understanding of homelessness, and policies that will end it.

The supporters of the coalition are the Baptist Union of Scotland, the Church of Scotland, the Evangelical Alliance, the Free Church of Scotland, the Iona Community, the Methodist Church of Scotland, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Roman Catholic Church of Scotland, the Salvation Army, the Scottish Episcopal Church (Anglican) the United Reformed Church and the United Free Church of Scotland.

* More on Scottish Churches Housing Action:
<http://www.churches-housing.org>

The programme of Francis' papacy: changing the culture of the Roman curia - The Tablet

Three days before Christmas in 2005 Pope Benedict XVI addressed the Roman Curia in what was considered to be a key speech of his pontificate.

Christopher Lamb write in The Tablet - In it he set out what he saw as the correct way to interpret the Second Vatican Council - the 1962-5 gathering that brought forward a series of reforms in the Church - criticising a “hermeneutic of discontinuity or rupture” that sees a split between the pre-conciliar and post-conciliar Church.

While how to interpret Vatican II was a recurring theme under Benedict, the reform of the Roman Curia has been high on Francis’ agenda.

And his speech today, [where he sets out the 15 diseases](#) that can infect those who work at the global church’s central administration, is also likely to be seen as an important document for his papacy.

Reforming the curia – or to others “cleaning it up” – was, after all, one of the reasons Francis was elected Pope.

Among the diseases the Pope included are the accumulation of power, gossip, “deifying” leaders, poor coordination and spiritual laxity or “Alzheimer’s.”

Granted, many of these points have been made by the Pope before but it is the first time he has set them out in a list in such an extensive way.

As a Jesuit, the Pope is leading an intensive examination of conscience trying to strip away all the things that are barriers to encountering Christ. He would surely include himself in some of the traps those in the curia can fall into as one of them is failing to take a rest. After all, he has refused a holiday since his March 2013 election.

But the 78-year-old Pope, who faces considerable opposition to his reforms from within the curia and possibly feels he is short of time, is not pulling his punches.

“A curia which is not self-critical, that you do not update, which does not seek to improve, is a sick body,” he said.

Francis warns of those who slander others “even in newspapers and magazines”; “petty and miserable” people looking “what they need to get and not what they have to give”; those for whom “colours of the robes and insignia” become the goal in life and others who go around with a face

“like a funeral” treating those “deemed inferior” with “stiffness, hardness and arrogance.”

Many of the people who work for the curia are hard working and of integrity but as Francis says: priests are like planes, most of them fly but when one crashes everyone hears about it.

When the Pope was elected the Vatican was at a low-ebb and still reeling from the Vatileaks scandal that saw confidential papers released alleging corruption at the heart of the Church.

Since being in office, Francis has set out plans to make the curia work more effectively. He’s appointed no-nonsense Australian Cardinal George Pell to reform the finances and it is expected that more reforms will be unveiled next year.

But for Francis it seems a change in culture is as important as a change in structure. He wants an end to careerism, gossip, scandal and the equally damaging sin of spiritual indifference.

The Roman Curia is arguably the oldest institution in the world and there will be some working in it who are prepared to simply bide their time and wait for a new pontificate. Francis

can't be expected to change things overnight but he has started a process that could lead to substantial and significant reform.

<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/529/the-programme-of-francis-papacy-changing-the-culture-of-the-roman-curia>

Bishop of Cuba thankful for bridges of hope



Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio, Episcopal Church of Cuba.

Following U.S. President Barack Obama's decision Dec. 17 to re-establish diplomatic ties with Cuba after 54 years, the leadership of the

Episcopal Church of Cuba released a statement thanking God for the repatriation of prisoners to both countries and thanking the churches in the United States for the “bridges of hope” they affirmed during the decades of separation.

The statement, signed by standing committee president the Rev. Alfredo Nuño, Suffragan Bishop Ulises Aguero and diocesan Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio, expressed gratitude to The Episcopal Church, noting that “through different strategies, such as travel, exchanges, and the presentation of official resolutions,” it has “accompanied our church and therefore our people.”

Joy was also expressed over the return of Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero and Ramon Labanino, the three remaining members of the “Cuban Five” who were held in U.S. prisons since 1998, and U.S. aid worker Alan Gross, who had been imprisoned in Cuba since 2009. The release of prisoners, the statement says, “show[s] that dialogue and a stance of mutual understanding and respect in the midst of differences are basic elements in the relationships among governments and peoples.”

The statement also acknowledged the uncertainty of the present moment, asking God to “guide the governments of both countries in wise decisions,” to “illuminate these new times and challenges that have come to the Cuban people,” and to “weave concord among the two peoples and affirm our commitment to the truth.”

The statement ended with an acknowledgement of the significance of such a momentous decision so close to Christmas. “Jesus was born so that reconciliation and peace could enter and fill the lives of women and men, of families and communities, of peoples and nations,” the statement reads. “May the light of Christmas be a fountain of blessings for both our peoples.”

Are Church leaders the world's most active peacemakers?

Michael Binyon writing in Diplomat Magazine says church leaders are now using their moral authority to persuade leaders in conflict situations to look again at proposals for peace

Are Christian church leaders becoming the world's most active peacemakers? Only a week after President Peres of Israel and the

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accepted the Pope's invitation to pray together with him in Rome, the Archbishop of Canterbury made a dramatic flight to Nigeria to pray with President Goodluck Jonathan and encourage him to make every effort to find the schoolgirls kidnapped by the terrorist organisation Boko Haram.



The Archbishop's impromptu trip came hard on the heels of a visit to Pakistan, where he visited a small embattled Christian community and praised their efforts to forge closer links with the wider Muslim community, despite regular attacks by militants, the threats of mob violence and the increasing use of the notorious blasphemy laws to force Christians from their land and property.

The two men, both new in their jobs and both with fresh agendas that place considerable emphasis on peace and reconciliation, have been increasingly active in tackling conflicts that have defied the efforts of the world's political leaders to resolve. While insisting they are not taking on political roles, and cautious of wading into the thickets of global diplomacy, both Pope Francis and the Most Revd Justin Welby have shown themselves skilled at using their huge moral authority to improve the political climate and persuade leaders in conflict situations to look again at proposals for peace.

Read the full article at <http://www.diplomatmagazine.com/issues/2014/july-august/874-church-diplomacy.html>

Media digest

Mail

Columnist Quentin Letts suggests new resolutions for celebrities and public figures, and says Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury should stop fretting about food banks and start worrying much more about the neglect of the old-fashioned hymns and prayers that once united England as a Christian country.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2893110/Resolutions-celebs-New-Year-Mail-s-brilliant-sketch-writer-QUENTIN-LETTTS.html#ixzz3NdohkgTB>

Tel

Article on 2015 being the year of the apology, Celia Walden writes that the Archbishop of Canterbury said he was sorry for missing Christmas, after he was unable to give his Christmas sermon due to a bout of pneumonia.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/11319463/Why-2015-will-be-the-year-of-the-apology.html>

Ind

Article claiming that segregation between different classes and ethnicities in Britain is worsening due to the increasing numbers of faith schools and the opening of free schools.

Matthew Taylor, chair of the Social Integration Commission, called on governors to issue regular reports on how their pupils are mixing to prevent serious divisions in society. He said: "Muslim faith schools seem to be much more monocultural than Catholic or Church of England schools."

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/faith-and-free-schools-breed-social-and-racial-segregation-warns-leading-campaigner-9952374.html>

BBC & Mail

Report that Liberia lifted a curfew imposed to curb Ebola in an effort to let church-goers attend New Year's Eve services. It states worshippers should avoid over-crowding and touching to prevent contagion, the deputy information minister said. Health agencies did not comment directly on the one-night suspension, but warned against complacency.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30644920>

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-2892284/Liberia-suspends-Ebola-curfew-allow-New-Years-Eve-worship.html?](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-2892284/Liberia-suspends-Ebola-curfew-allow-New-Years-Eve-worship.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

[ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-2892284/Liberia-suspends-Ebola-curfew-allow-New-Years-Eve-worship.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

BBC/Mail

Report that the first serving Church of England vicar to undergo a sex change has died from cancer at the age of 60. It states the Reverend Carol Stone, formerly Peter Stone, died on Saturday following a battle with pancreatic cancer. The vicar of St Philip's Church in Upper Stratton and St Peter's Church in Penhill, Swindon, Ms Stone underwent a sex change operation in 2000. The Bishop of Swindon, Lee Rayfield, said: "She was a really true priest who overcame a huge amount in her life."

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-wiltshire-30642056>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2892859/First-Church-England-vicar-undergo-sex-change-operation-dies-aged-60-cancer-battle.html>

Guard

Letter from the Rev Canon Andy Thompson, the Senior chaplain at St Andrew's Church, Abu Dhabi, in which he refers to persecution of Christians in the Middle East. He thanks the paper for raising awareness about the suffering of Christians, but says in the case of the Gulf the editorial is an inadequate representation of the experience of the church. He states there is no persecution in the UAE, Bahrain or Oman and the UAE as an excellent example of religious freedom within an Islamic framework.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/31/reality-of-being-christian-in-the-gulf>