

St John's College sold to Respond

By Jamie O'Keeffe

Respond Housing Association has acquired St John's College and its immediate surrounds from the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore. The purchase price for the landmark 2.9-acre building hasn't been disclosed.

The former Seminary is to be used to provide much needed 'good-quality' apartments and homes for the elderly. The John's Hill site is close to the city centre and just a five minute walk from the 340-acre People's Park.

The deal, which is subject to the approval of the Charity Commissioners, has been welcomed by Bishop William Lee, who wished Respond 'every blessing in this exciting endeavour'.

St John's Seminary was closed in 1999 due to a serious decline in vocations to the priesthood. Fr Liam Power, Diocesan Communications Officer, says: 'We are very pleased that the former seminary building will once again, in a somewhat different manner, be used for the service of the community, the city of Waterford and the diocese of Waterford and Lismore.'

'We are particularly pleased that many elderly citizens will benefit from the use to which Respond, with its proven expertise and customary sensitivity, will put the building,' he added.

In May 2005 a majority of city councillors voted to rezone the diocesan lands from community to residential use. A planning application is expected to be lodged with the City Council in due course. The Seminary building is a Protected Structure under the City Development Plan.

Other uses

Already a considerable portion of the former Seminary's property is devoted to community purposes. For quite a number of years the Waterford Scouts have a valuable headquarters in the area of college land between John's Hill and the Folly. Their purpose-built building is in constant use.

Also, many educational, artistic, community and recreational groups are now using a freestanding spacious hall adjacent to the Seminary building.

However, the option of adapting the main Seminary for a new Pastoral Centre proved financially prohibitive, and a new replacement building has been constructed at a cost of nearly €2m.

It houses a host of different diocesan and local agencies, including Accord and Cura, as well as offices and facilities for Catechetics and Education Ministries, parish development and renewal, and lay training. The Bishop is confident that 'St John's Pastoral Centre will prove to be an agent of great good and service to the Church and general community of Waterford and beyond'.

A sizeable portion of the Seminary grounds - approximately 5.5 acres - is being retained by the diocese for future needs. The remaining 9 acres or so will be offered for sale shortly, with the monies realised from same to be set aside for the possibility of

erecting a future Seminary for priest training; the repayment of the loan for the building of the Pastoral Centre; funds for the future proper maintenance and staffing of the Pastoral Centre; and the training of lay ministers in the diocese.

The largest non-profit housing association in Ireland and a company limited by guarantee with charity status, Respond was established in Waterford in 1982 by Franciscan priest, Fr Pat Cogan, who remains its executive managing director.

Respond has been at the forefront of providing high-quality, low-cost housing under a variety of governmental and private schemes for over 20 years, constructing around 90 housing estates and providing accommodation for over 3,000 families. It currently has a further 628 houses under construction.