

**Catholic Parish of St Edmund King and Martyr, Godalming
with St Joseph, Milford**

22nd July 2020

Dear Brothers and sisters,

Update on Buildings and Parish Redevelopment

For the last 30 years and more the parish has sought to resolve the challenges of being a multi-site mission with its oldest church being listed, with difficult stepped access and virtually no parking. Many schemes have been considered and thanks to the work of the members of the F&GP, under Fr David as parish priest, a clear consensus was reached in 2019 that St Edmund's should be sold and the proceeds used to improve the facilities at St Joseph's and acquire a new presbytery.

Outcome of feasibility study for St Joseph's

The feasibility studies for that process were concluded as we went into lockdown (just short of the last step of seeking pre-application planning advice for the work at St Joseph's, though architect and planning professionals are positive). Those studies indicate that a sum of between £1.5M and £2M is likely to be raised by the sale of the Croft Road site and that this would enable us to provide:

- 77m² of meeting space (and a small kitchen) at the front of St Joseph's that could be used as overspill for particularly large Masses;
- A new sacristy and parish office at the rear;
- Refurbishment of the inside of the church to provide a little more seating (capacity ca 200-230), a space for musicians and a sound-proof room for families with small children.

More extensive schemes were considered, but ultimately ruled out on the grounds either of cost or of anticipated planning difficulties. The outcome is not perfect – as is often the case when dealing with these things in the actual world – but the consultation at the start of last year confirmed that the parish has the maturity to accept that.

Should we consider re-development at St Edmund's?

With considerable trepidation, therefore, I raise the alternative of the re-development of the St Edmund's site, providing a lift from street level for better access, some additional parking spaces in the front, along with a hall, kitchen, office and toilets behind the church. It may also be possible to install a small gallery at the back that would provide a glazed narthex and a further 25-30 seats.

I am not at this point arguing that we should now decide to go this route, nor proposing a vote on the matter. Rather I would like feedback on whether such an option should be given more serious consideration by the parish and the matter re-opened. If our discussions concluded against it then we have a clear way forward at Milford, and I hope that any such reconsideration would be concluded by the end of the calendar year.

A number of points indicate to me that re-development may be worth consideration:

- Many have expressed their fondness for St Edmund's and how they value it as a church. (And there are those for whom St Joseph's is important too.) Many appreciate the

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architecture of St Edmund's. It is a visible component of the Godalming townscape from the station and the Lammas Lands. Its central location fits with a local plan that is encouraging walking and cycling and moving away from cars as part of a sustainability strategy. It offers an integrated site within walking distance of the school.

- Initial informal discussions with heritage specialists indicated that such a project may be acceptable in a listed building, with sensitive treatment. This is backed up by responses to some earlier schemes considered for St Edmund's in the 1990s.
- An architect's feasibility study on St Edmund's suggests that an annex behind the church slightly larger than the nave (ca190m²), a lift, some additional parking and a gallery might be provided for around £1M. Fees need to be added, but with the right design most of the works should be zero-rated for VAT, bringing costs to something like £1.2M. We think this estimate could be optimistic but decided to see if there is any major interest in exploring this option before getting them checked by a quantity surveyor. (Costs might be controlled by omitting the gallery.)
- The St Joseph's site is 0.4 acres. Initial discussion with estate agents suggested good potential for residential development. This is further supported by an architect's feasibility study which indicates a market guide value of £950k - £1M. We have not yet sought pre-application planning advice to validate these two studies but that would be a next step, if the parish considered it worth exploring the option.
- There is no doubt that masses at St Joseph's and St John's are better attended than at St Edmund's, but it is not clear how much of that is a feature of a preferred time and how much a question of space and/or location.
- It is likely that within a few years the parish priest will also be exercising care of souls at Ladywell. The regular Mass there would provide a highly accessible option that was part of the parish community, especially on a weekday.

It is an option that I don't think the parish has actively considered, and I feel that I have a duty to ask about it, at least in this informal but open manner, before confirming the plans to work to establish Milford as our principal presence in the area.

Whichever line we pursue will take an amount of work, but it is important to our mission to have a place in which we can welcome and be welcomed. Every family needs a place that is its home, a hearth around which it gathers, a table at which it is nourished and a place in which it rests so that it flourishes and is fit and ready for its work. A developed St Joseph's could do that, but I do wonder whether a developed St Edmund's might not only be feasible now but the better place to be in 20 years' time.

In trying to discern the next steps your comments and thoughts would be most welcome as would your prayers and any offers of help or support for whichever project we pursue. There will also be questions that you may wish to ask, and I encourage you to do so.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Fr Jonathan

Parish Priest

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