

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

8 October 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What next for St Edmund's and St Joseph's Churches?

I am writing to update you on the responses received following my update on buildings earlier this summer. In summary, while the 2019 survey showed significant support for the sale of St Edmund's and the development of St Joseph's **it is no longer clear that the wish of the parish is that St Edmund's should be sold and therefore we should now revisit the question of our parish buildings.**

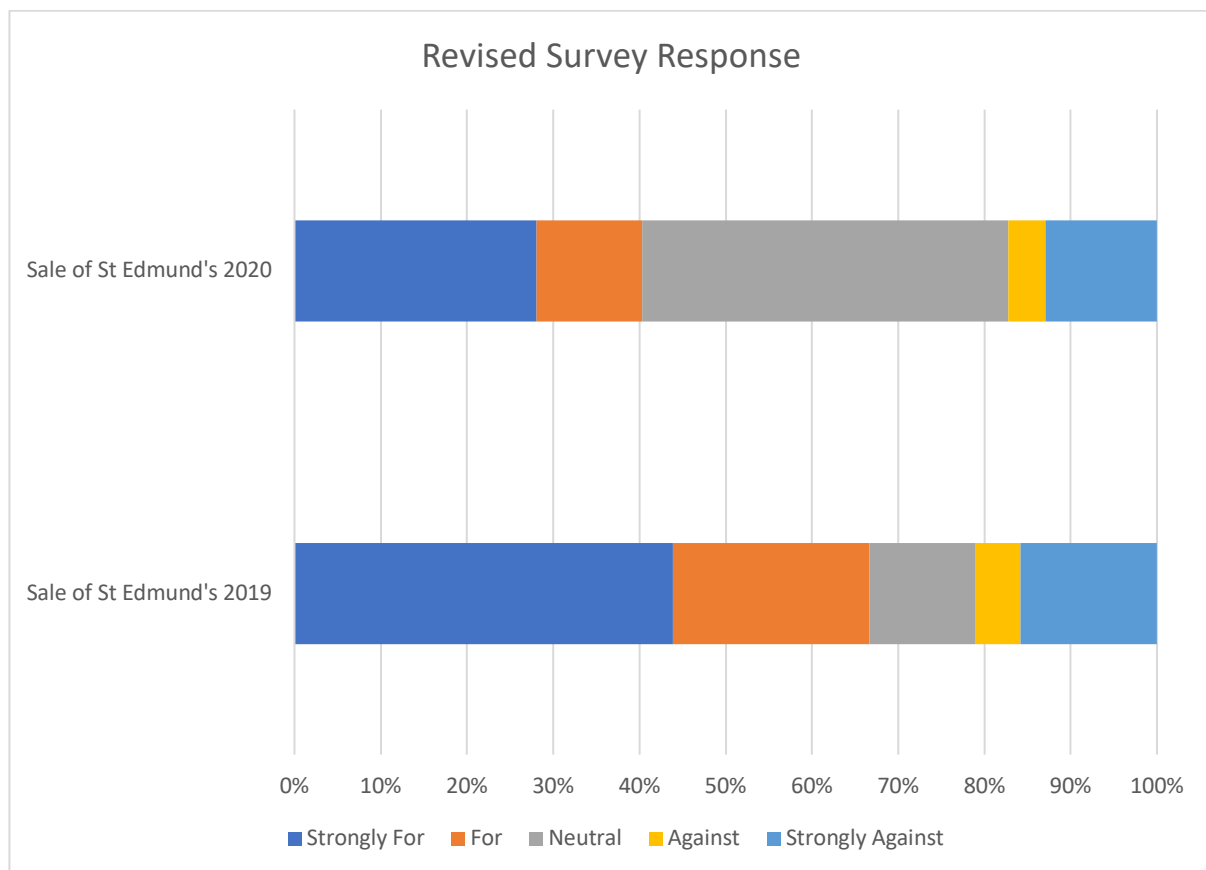
Overview of Responses

42 comments were received from the 117 who responded to the 2019 survey. Of these

- 14 confirmed their original view in favour of selling St Edmund's;
- 18 who were in favour of selling St Edmund's in 2019 would now like to consider the matter further;
- 10 confirmed their neutral position or opposition its sale.

28 comments were received from people who did not respond in 2019, extending its range by some 24%.

- One of these supported the plan as presented in 2019;
- 27 indicated a desire to consider the matter further or a preference to develop St Edmund's.



Interpretation

The responses should be considered in the light of the support for selling St Edmund's in the 2019 survey and the limited scope of the July 2020 update, which asked only about whether we should consider further and not which was the preferred option. The chart above tries to visualise the impact of recent responses on those given in 2019. For ease of representation:

- Those who expressed support for the sale of St Edmund's in 2019 and who have not responded to this recent paper, I have treated as still supporting the 2019 plan without a need for further discussion;

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- those who have expressed a desire for further discussion (or a newly contributed and stronger opinion in favour of retaining St Edmund's) I have treated here as neutral;
- 5 respondents from 2019 have moved away or died, and their responses have been marked blank.

It is now not clear that the wish of the parish is that St Edmund's should be sold and we should therefore revisit the question of our parish buildings.

The responses included a variety of views within the parish concerning which of the two spaces is the better, the availability of parking at each site, and the place of the church within the parish and local community. Gathering and sharing such views in a structured and systematic manner will form part of our next step and will help our parish grow in communion and mutual understanding.

What next?

It remains unlikely that we would sustain two churches in the medium term. Responses over the summer indicate, when taken alongside the 2019 survey, that there are a significant number of parishioners who believe that we should discuss our options further.

The feasibility studies begun over the last few years provide us with important information on the broad costs of providing the additional amenities we need to support our life and mission, and on the potential for our land to help accommodate and finance such work.

The value of land for development is currently depressed by uncertainty around the economy but is expected to recover. This provides us with a timely opportunity to listen and discern where God may be leading us in this aspect of our life.

I am therefore forming a working group who will help steer us in our discernment of the way forward. Its membership will be communicated to the parish in due course, and I would be very happy to receive recommendations of people who have strong facilitation skills whom I might approach. I would wish to agree the formal terms of reference with them when they meet, but I would broadly expect them to build on work already done and to include:

- Identification of the various stakeholders.
- Engagement with them and establishing their perspectives on what we need and which options might best meet such need.
- Facilitating dialogue between them so that different voices can be heard.
- Systematic analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the options for formal consideration by the parish at some point in 2021.

Once the preferred option has been confirmed or established further enquiries would then be made of planners, quantity surveyors and architects to confirm its feasibility. Relatively little is needed if the preference for developing St Joseph's were confirmed and a little more in the case of developing St Edmund's. There is an argument that says that a more accurate idea of costs should lead our thinking, but my listening to the parish leads me to believe that the main questions at this point are ones of vision and mission and that we need a shared conversation about these first. As we are meeting only in smaller numbers at present this will take time but can be progressed.

I will, of course, do my best to respond to any questions but at this point they, and any comments, might be more fruitfully shared with the working group once it has formed.

Please continue your prayers for all those, near and far impacted by this pandemic, and for the gift of wisdom and understanding for our parish as we discern our next steps.

Fr Jonathan