

## Building Review Group Report January 2024

### Introduction

The Catholic mission in Godalming began in 1899, being served initially from Guildford and covering the area West to Hindead, South to Haslemere and East to Cranleigh. Over the years Haslemere and then Bramley became established as separate parishes. In 1954, before the building of St Joseph's in Milford, Sunday Mass was celebrated in seven different churches and chapels in the parish, supported by the communities of clergy and religious in the area.

Since the late 1980s there has been an oft expressed desire to centre the parish on a single church, both to build a sense of community and also to make provision for an expected decline in the number of diocesan priests. A large number of options were explored over the years. In 2019, on the basis that any changes to St Edmund's as a church were unfeasible and that it may be possible to convert the church to housing, the parish were consulted on the closure of the St Edmund's Church and centring the mission on St Joseph's, with 77 out of 110 respondents supporting the move.

As part of the due diligence in such a major change, a small group was formed to clarify the planning, conservation and cost issues around the development of each of St Joseph's and St Edmund's as the church serving Godalming and to consider the positives and negatives of each option. The group used outline building designs for the feasibility studies to help develop a brief and establish orders of cost and any major planning problems. More detailed design work would follow once the direction of travel has been established and agreed.

This report presents the findings of the group and will provide the basis on which the voice of parishioners will be sought regarding where the Spirit is leading us next. There will be opportunities shortly for feedback, via online and paper questionnaires, on the two main options presented later in the report.

Doing nothing is not an option: both of our churches and the presbytery are in need of maintenance work and the emerging Diocesan Pastoral Plan indicates that before long Godalming will need to function as part of the wider Guildford team, with the area being served by fewer priests. Closing one of our churches, while a real loss to the parish, would both help manage our ongoing costs and provide a modest amount of capital to improve the facilities at the remaining one.

### 1. Summary of Findings

**St Edmund's** Our enquiries established that:

- (i) There were no major planning or conservation problems with the development of the site, subject to an appropriate design;
- (ii) Redeveloping behind St Edmund's would be very costly and probably unaffordable;
- (iii) The demolition and rebuilding of the presbytery as a parish centre would require less additional funding than developing the area behind the church;
- (iv) The provision of a lift and remodelling of the presbytery to provide space for the parish should be achievable with the more modest means available from the sale of the St Joseph's site and some further fundraising/borrowing.

**St Joseph's** Our enquiries so far confirm that

- (i) There were no significant planning problems with some modest additions to the church;
- (ii) At least some modest additions could be made with the proceeds from the sale of St Edmund's and the Presbytery.

## 2. Comparisons of key options considered since 2019 and their costs

- **Option A:** Build an annexe about the size of the current nave in the hillside behind St Edmund's, adding 180m<sup>2</sup> to the church, a lift providing access from the pavement to the church door and additional parking spaces. This was the first and most complex option we considered and as such received the most detailed consideration. The cost would be something like £2.9 million. The sale of St Joseph's in Milford would raise £800k - £1 million towards this, leaving too great a funding gap. Under this option the presbytery is retained at Croft Road. The flat could be modified to be let if not required for the priest.

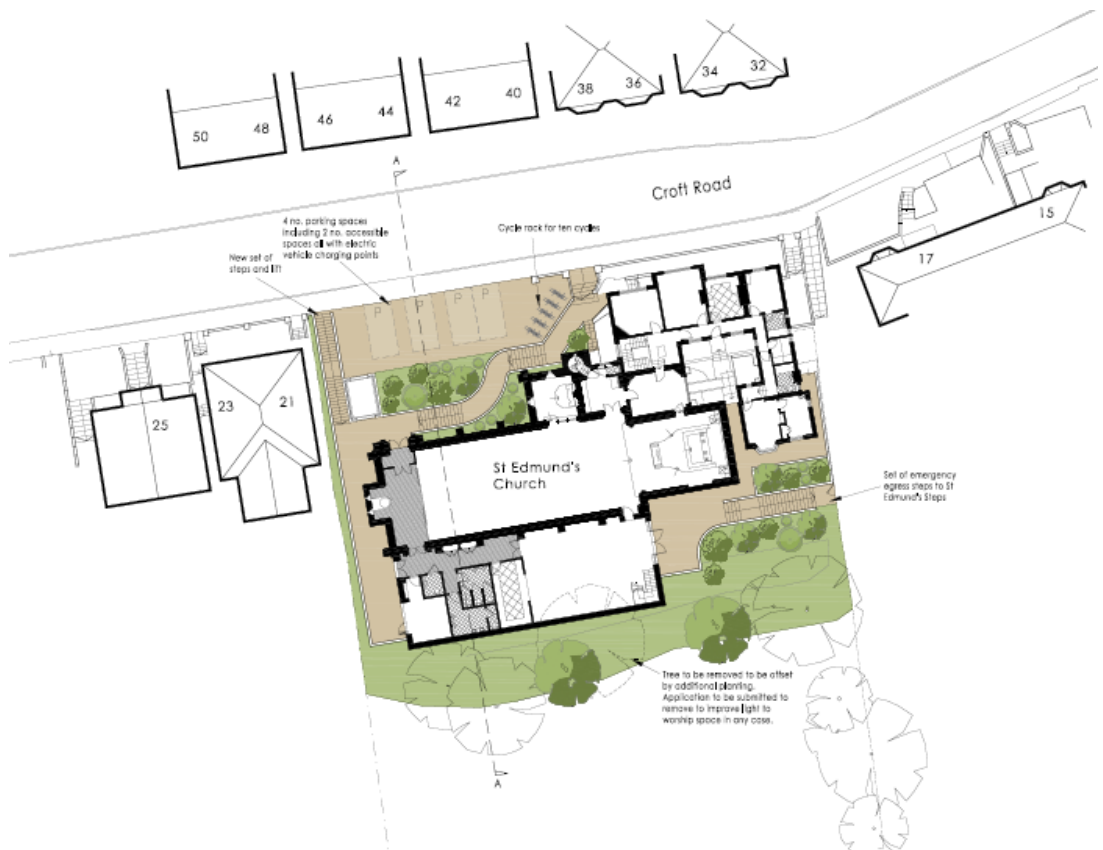


Fig 1. Option A. Plan and Elevation for annexe behind church

- Option B:** Demolition of the Presbytery, rebuilding a parish centre on its footprint on two floors (up to say 260m<sup>2</sup>) including a lift from pavement to church level, accessing the church through the current sacristy, and provision of one or two more parking places. This is a less complex option at an estimated cost of £1.6 million. The sale of St Joseph's in Milford would raise £800k - £1 million towards this. A funding gap would remain which could be closed by some fundraising or borrowing, providing amenities on a smaller scale (perhaps in line with those proposed for St Joseph's below), and/or phasing the rebuild allowing the provision of further amenities by a future generation. Under this option, alternative accommodation would need to be provided for the priest.

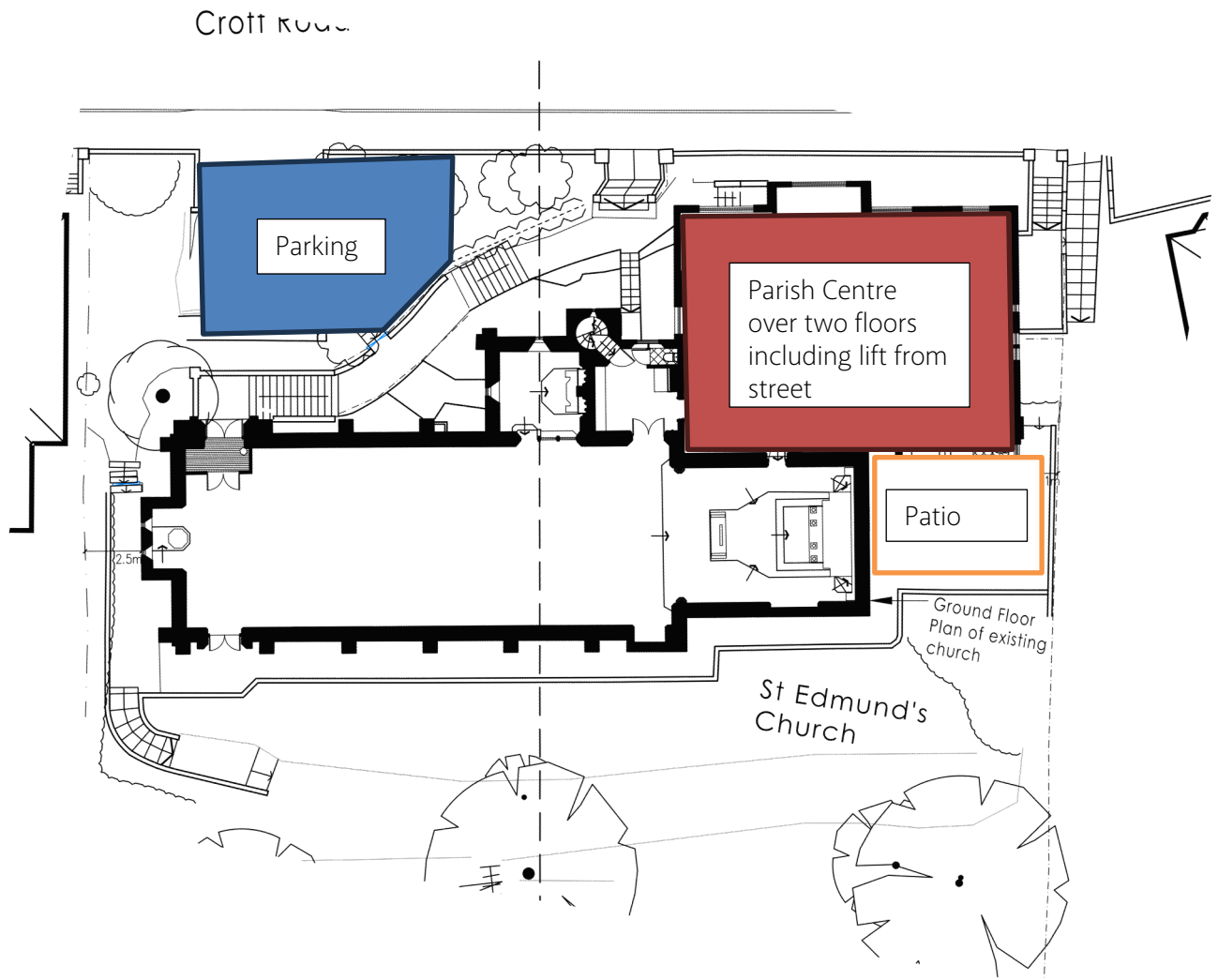


Fig 2. Option B. Block Plan for conversion of presbytery

- Option C:** Extension at the front and rear of St Joseph's, adding 130m<sup>2</sup>. This is the simplest building option at an estimated cost of £1 million. Our own difficulties in using or developing St Edmund's Church would be experienced by another user of the church and this is reflected in an estimated sale value of around £500k for the church and £550k for the presbytery. There would be significant additional costs to meet to find appropriate homes for the sacred art at St Edmund's (say, £200k), but the scale of building at St Joseph's could be adapted to meet the funds available. Under this option, alternative accommodation would need to be provided for the priest. A more limited amount of fundraising may be needed to make the best of the project.

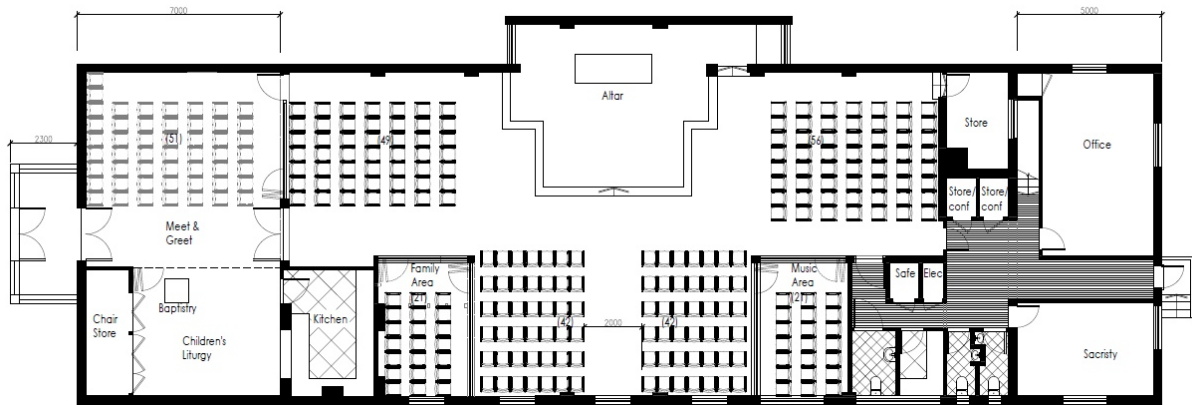


Fig 3. Option C. Plan, showing some additional internal reordering to maximise seating.

### 3. Godalming Parish in the Diocesan Pastoral Plan

The Diocesan Pastoral Plan indicates that Godalming will become a community within the extended parish of Guildford, along with the other churches of the present deanery, working far more closely together and served by a smaller clergy team, and that Sunday Mass will be celebrated less frequently and in fewer locations than today. In our local context, this means that there is unlikely to be more than one Sunday morning Mass in Godalming. As the plan develops, there may be an evening Mass.

**St John's**, Farncombe provides a well-resourced space for the popular 8.45am Sunday Mass.

However, the very limited time at our disposal and the need for St John's to focus on their own mission means we cannot adopt it as our principal centre. If there were sufficient priests in the area for Godalming to have only one Sunday Mass, it would probably be in a church other than St John's so that our community could celebrate Sunday Mass without needing to clock watch.

### 4. Options for Further Consideration

The concept of adding an annexe at the rear of St Edmund's and providing more extensive amenities and access is costly and probably unaffordable, as stated above. It is therefore excluded. There are two basic options which remain, summarised below. The Building Review Group analysis of the positives and negatives of each follows. **(Please remember that the drawings in this report are only indicative.)**

**Option Joseph:** St Joseph's becomes the church for Godalming and is extended to provide a room for hospitality / children's liturgy (about twice the size of the current parish room), and a disabled toilet, retaining as much of the parking as we can. No major reordering of the church is included, but some of the sacred furnishings would be transferred from St Edmund's. It may be possible to provide some additional seating and a parish office. Some fundraising may be required. (See Fig 3. above for an idea of how this might work.)

**Option Edmund:** St Edmund's becomes the church for Godalming, with improved access via a lift from street level, one or two extra parking places and pick-up/drop-off provision in Croft Road. The presbytery would be rebuilt to provide a large meeting room (about half the size of the nave of the church), toilets, and a parish office. This larger build would likely require fundraising of around £200k more than St Joseph's, but deliver a 50% larger meeting room. If this option is chosen further work would be required to ensure an adequate design can be achieved. (See Fig 2 above for an idea of how this might work.)

Positives and Negatives Option Joseph (St Joseph's)

<b>Positives</b>	<b>Negatives</b>
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-site parking sufficient for day-to-day use</li> <li>• Located in village of Milford and good links with Witley and the A3</li> <li>• Open design of church</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within walking distance of a smaller population                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Most will need to come by car</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Assets/Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of 223m<sup>2</sup> seating ca 184</li> <li>• New Narthex (entrance area) of 77m<sup>2</sup> (including meeting room of 56m<sup>2</sup>) and possible gallery and storage above</li> <li>• Sacristy, store, and small toilet 60m<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Additional parking at 350m at village hall and farm shop. Small public car park further away.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Limitations/Restrictions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedestrian access mixed with traffic and no footpath direct to site</li> <li>• Harder to access for those without a car</li> <li>• Limited space for hospitality and meeting, and also for storage</li> <li>• Orientation of church provides a more difficult acoustic</li> <li>• Not within walking distance of St Edmund's School</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier to retrofit building to improve insulation</li> <li>• Simple traditional build is more straightforward and will cost less to maintain</li> <li>• Easier to use Narthex for some additional seating</li> <li>• May be able to incorporate some of the sacred art from St Edmund's</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diminished presence in town of Godalming (main centre)</li> <li>• Increased car use may reduce availability of on-street parking</li> <li>• Complexity and cost of deconsecration of St Edmund's</li> </ul>
<p><b>Prospects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a centre that can easily meet day to day needs for those who choose to travel there</li> </ul>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of identification with the larger population increases the attraction of Guildford and/or Farnham.</li> <li>• Maintaining safe access through site in icy weather</li> </ul>

## Positives and Negatives Option Edmund (St Edmund's)

*Based on current church with addition of a lift and annexe*

<b>Positives</b>	<b>Negatives</b>
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located in main centre of population               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Within walking distance for many</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Traditionally designed church, of architectural significance (Grade II listed), with high quality stained glass and fittings.</li> <li>• Located near train station and main bus route</li> <li>• Development of church fits with many aspects of local plan</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very limited parking on site</li> <li>• Challenging for independent access for those with mobility difficulties</li> </ul>
<p><b>(Planned) Assets/Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of 240m<sup>2</sup> seating 180 people</li> <li>• Parish rooms to modern building standards over two floors on site of former presbytery, say 190m<sup>2</sup> total, including main room of ca100m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>• Basement and Organ Loft provide for 36m<sup>2</sup> storage in addition to 20m<sup>2</sup> sacristy</li> <li>• Sound construction</li> <li>• Access to town centre parking at 300m</li> </ul>	<p><b>Limitations/Restrictions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional fundraising of at least £200k would be needed</li> <li>• Uneven footpaths</li> <li>• Meeting space should be more than at St Joseph's but not quite as large as the room at St John's.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closer links with St Edmund's School</li> <li>• Closer links with other churches and civic society in Godalming</li> <li>• Grounds and patio behind church could be landscaped to provide more open space</li> <li>• A rear gallery could provide some additional seating if needed</li> <li>• An agreement for offsite parking for 50 cars could be sought with St Hilary's</li> <li>• Longer dropped curb should provide better drop-off</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older structure relatively more difficult to heat</li> <li>• Changes in regulatory requirements making operation of site more difficult</li> <li>• Access through local area (pavements and lighting) in the hands of public authority</li> </ul>
<p><b>Prospects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a centre with strong sense of identity, providing focal point in one of the largest local towns</li> </ul>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing maintenance</li> <li>• Lift outages</li> <li>• Very difficult to get to in icy conditions</li> </ul>

**Next Steps.** Feedback will be sought from the parish by way of a questionnaire. This feedback will be highly significant for the bishop when he meets with the planning team at the end April.

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Where can I make my views known on the options?** There is an online questionnaire at <https://forms.office.com/e/cf4CCFVcz2>. Paper versions are available at the back of church. Responses should be in by 18<sup>th</sup> March 2024.
2. **Will the feedback be published?** An overview of the feedback from the parish will be published after the meeting with Bishop Richard.
3. **Would it be possible to consider fully designed options before deciding?** This would be unwise. Feasibility studies can be conducted on the basis of a few days of design work. More detailed planning and the associated reports would likely cost in the region of £50k for each site.
4. **Could we get more income by developing the sites ourselves?** This is not our area of expertise and it would be a major distraction from our main mission. Also, the Diocesan Trustees are unlikely to be happy to accept the level of risk involved in acting as the developer.
5. **Could we simply share another church?** In previous correspondence, the bishop has been clear that we should be centred on a Catholic church.
6. **What about Ladywell?** The chapel at Ladywell is too integrated into the site to hold as a parish church without taking on a much larger part of the estate.
7. **What about a new site?** Godalming and its surroundings are either congested or greenbelt. There is very little land available and it is expensive. Comparing the costs of a new site with developing Milford, one might anticipate a land cost of £1.5-£2M, and building costs of say £3-4M.
8. **What about the Polish Community?** The Polish mission had Mass at St Edmund's before St Joseph's was built. Their principal centres are now more in Fleet and Guildford. Their views will also be sought.
9. **Can we see the Quantity Surveyor's report on costs and the Pre-Application Planning Advice?** Yes. They are long documents so we are not including them with the report, but they are available on request.
10. **How do building costs compare between the two options.** Quantity Surveyor estimates show that costs are comparative between the two sites, the additional cost of working at Croft Road being offset by much of the work being zero rated for Vat (providing disabled access and a community use annexe).
11. **Could we not retain both churches?** There is in excess of £150,000 maintenance due on the parish estate. Addressing it has been postponed over the last 10 years while we discern the best way forward, but this cannot be done forever, and it would be imprudent to spend significant sums for a church in which Mass is celebrated only on an occasional weekday.
12. **What about the new fire exit at St Joseph's?** Experience suggests that it will take a couple of years to complete any building works and in the meantime we need to be able to safely accommodate our main parish celebrations at St Joseph's.
13. **What would be the alternative accommodation for the priest?** This may depend on whether the community was centred around St Edmund's or St Joseph's, and how the pastoral plan unfolds, but the bishop has asked Fr Jonathan to look for a place in which could reside in the Godalming area. It is anticipated that this may be purchased from central diocesan funds.

Building Review Group

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