

## **Views and Vision: First Parish Consultation Results**

### **Introduction**

Two years ago, an event took place at St Edward's Parish that resulted in significant changes. The parish priest, who retired in 2017, was not replaced with another priest who would provide pastoral care and stewardship exclusive to St Edward's. Instead, like many other parishes in the Diocese of Leeds, we would be assigned a priest who had also pastoral and stewardship responsibilities in another parish.

The parishioners at St Edward's were visited by Monsignor Paul Fisher, Vicar General for the Diocese of Leeds, and Kevin Anderson, its property administrator. At this meeting these diocesan representatives laid out a plan. They said that in keeping with its policy to liquidate the unused property assets within the diocese, to relieve diocesan debt, they sought to have the soon to be vacant presbytery sold along with vacant fields owned by the parish. The proceeds, intended for use by the parish, would be listed as Diocesan assets until needed by the parish for approved projects.

During the last two years we have been evaluating St Edward's financial position. This included assessing the condition of the presbytery and the costs needed to repair or update it for some use. The council decided that along with the ongoing cost of upkeep and repairs to the church itself, the added debt of renovation of the presbytery and retaining it would put the parish at risk financially. Concluding that as a parish we are cash poor and asset rich, we began to consider how we might enter into a partnership with the Diocese that would both satisfy its policy and allow St Edwards to develop into a parish that will offer its parishioners a future that ensures its sustainability.

As a council, we considered what projects might allow St Edward's parish to grow as a changing Catholic community, with the challenge of preserving its historical significance. After several months of discussion, we identified aims that would address the parish debt while at the same time meet the current and future needs of a flourishing parish. With these aims in mind, a member of the council surveyed the parish property and developed our words into a concept of what a desirable plan for growth might look like. This concept was presented by the council to the parish community through a one month consultation period.

### **The Consultation**

A comprehensive display was set up in the parish room on 23 March. Members of the parish were invited to view the display with the included visual concept, that is, a set of draft architectural plans, a series of photographs of the property that could be affected, and a document detailing both the needs discussed by the council members and proposed solutions to fulfil those needs. Four opportunities to meet and speak with members of the council personally and to tour the area proposed for use were arranged over two weekends. The parishioners were notified of the consultation through the parish weekly newsletter. Additionally, parents of children attending St Edward's primary school were contacted by e-mail and through the school newsletter. The display remained in the parish rooms after the live consultation sessions to allow parish members also to view it at their leisure.

Council members explained that the draft plans on display were based on the assumption that the presbytery would be sold. These plans were presented as suggestions proposed for discussion in this preliminary consultation with members of St Edward's parish. It was emphasised that an architect with expertise in church development projects would be employed if the parish agreed with the overall concept and if Fr Newman decided to proceed. Furthermore, they were advised that other consultations would take place once recommendations from the architect were received.

Parishioners who attended were encouraged to fill out feedback forms to rate their opinions on each of the 10 proposals and to comment further. They were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with what was proposed by rating each aspect numerically. They were also asked to comment on issues that mattered to them and offer their own ideas about what they would like to

see in any development plans. Those who responded were given the option to identify themselves by name and age group.

We assessed the results of the consultation by measuring the number of the feedback forms returned during the month long period against the only number of record for parish members available. There is no parish registration list or census except for the number of parishioners who contribute to the support of St Edward's by using either donation envelopes or by standing order. This number is 90. It is not possible to use the number attending week-end Masses because this number varies and would include members of other parishes or other visitors. Likewise, it is not possible to include an estimated number based on the weekly loose contributions for the same reason and a calculation of what might be an average loose contribution would be inaccurate at best.

Next, we counted the response to each of proposals and calculated a percentage for each: completely agree, agree with some reservation or completely disagree. The comments and suggestions for each of the proposals were categorised by level of agreement or disagreement.

During the live consultation sessions, we estimated the number of persons who came to view the display in the parish room or who toured the grounds to be 74, noting that some returned to view and consult during more than one session. Those who we recognised as returning were discounted from in the overall estimate. Likewise, we discounted residents of Clifford Village who do not attend our church but who walked into the parish room during the live consultation periods. On this basis, and using the number of record, more than 80% of the parish viewed the display of the proposals or toured the grounds. We received 45 feedback forms from members of St Edward's parish. This is a rate of return from the consultation of 61%. In addition to these formal sessions, we enlisted the help of a parishioner associated with the council to speak informally with parents at St Edward's school about the details of the proposed concept. This was done to encourage the participation of younger adults within the parish in the consultation process.

The parishioners viewed a proposal that, based upon the sale of the presbytery and the fields behind it, provided funds needed to update and maintain the church itself. It located a new presbytery as required by Canon Law, added to the size of the cemetery, and provided an outbuilding for storage, all on the site of the current presbytery garden. An access way to these areas was also included.

The proposal also suggests extending the ground floor of the parish rooms to provide an area for larger parish functions. Two areas for parking, including spaces for the disabled: one near the proposed presbytery and another outside the parish room extension were suggested. The overall proposal takes into account the need to landscape any areas affected by development with the replacement of trees and shrubs where necessary. Within this concept, an area for prayer and reflection is provided. The overall proposal also would include the installation of artwork from local artists throughout the parish grounds. There is also a proposal to build a toilet within the porch of the west door to provide easy access for the disabled and others.

### **The Results**

At the conclusion of this consultation period, 87% approve the overall concept. This is the average percentage of approval for the individual aspects of the concept that were presented. Additionally, we were advised by our associate that at least 20 parents were contacted and expressed positive views. Now we can recommend that some of the parish assets: the presbytery with a portion of its grounds and a portion of the fields behind it, be sold to regain financial stability and to re-develop the remaining parish property in some way with this knowledge.

The results from the responses from the feedback forms are reported in percentages. In reporting overall approval to recommend that Fr Newman proceed with a plan to enter into partnership with the Diocese, we have combined the views of those who agreed with some reservation in the percentage for agreement. The views on each of the aspects are similarly reported with notation of the percentage with reservation.



Turning to the individual aspects of the concept, the results are as follows:  
(Please note that some percentages do not equal 100 when totalled due to rounding)

1. Access around the Church and Cemetery : 75.5% agree ( of which 17% agree with reservation); 24% disagree
2. Extra provision of graves: 100% agree (16% with reservation)
3. Plans for new presbytery: 82% agree (25% with reservation); 18% disagree
4. Extension to parish rooms: 73.5% agree (18% with reservation); 27% disagree
5. New storage/outbuilding: 93% agree (32% with reservation); 4.5% disagree
6. Car parking: 86% agree (33% with reservation); 13% disagree
7. Tree, shrub and landscaping: 84% agree (26% with reservation); 16% disagree
8. Repairs and maintenance to church building: 97% agree (4.5% with reservation)
9. Disabled access WC from new porch: 90.5% agree (32% with reservation); 10% disagree
10. Community involvement in art initiatives: 88% agree (15% with reservation); 12% disagree

### **Opinions on the Aspects of the Concept**

More than half of those who responded (55%) voiced their personal opinions on one or more of the aspects of the concept. These have been kept on file for use by the council, the architect and others who may be involved in the planning process. Below are excerpts selected from different age groups and of different levels of agreement or of disagreement on the aspects yielding the most comments:

On the access road, "...The proposed access around the perimeter of the church grounds, allowing vehicles to drive directly around the graveyard would spoil the peace and tranquility of the consecrated area." (age 41-60; completely disagree).

The extra provision of graves, "...In future there will be a need for even more grave plots, as already, non parishioners are being buried here. ..." (81 or over; completely agree)

About the plans for a new presbytery, "...The existing presbytery, if sold, should be in one lot primarily for the use as a home with clauses stipulating that it must not be converted into flats nor any erection of any extra building in the surrounding area. ..." (81 or over; agree with some reservations)

Extension to parish rooms, "Regarding the parish rooms- it would seem a lot of expense for a small extension that is only used for short periods of time. However, if the money is available and the use of the upstairs as a base for (the parish priest) is agreed- then why not!" (41-60; agree with some reservations)

About the new storage/outbuilding, "The outbuilding needs to be very secure if in an isolated position (61-60; agree with some reservations)

On car parking, "my main comments relate to the car parking/landscaping. Can considerations be given to screening the parking areas?..." (41-60; agree with some reservations)

Also on parking, "I think that there is sufficient parking already (down nearby roads) so am against building parking." (15-25; completely disagree)

Tree, shrub and landscaping, "Landscaping must be kept simple for ease of maintenance." (61-80; agree with some reservations)

Also, "...No mature trees should (be) cut down-that would be an act of vandalism. ..." (41-60; completely disagree)

And, "Keen to preserve existing mature trees, particularly the beech trees and pine trees." (61-80 agree with some reservations)

About the disabled WC from the porch: "I don't deem a toilet in the church building a priority or necessity." (26-40; agree with some reservations)

And, "...Is the idea to have a toilet accessible to all, at all times the church is open?" (41-60 agree with some reservations)

### **Other Comments and Suggestions:**

" Firstly, thank you to all involved in putting together these ideas. My initial reaction was one of dismay that we would be changing the outlook of the parish. However on reflection, the changes will support thriving parish going forward. ..." (41-60)

"As a community- we must endeavour to 'sing from the same hymn sheet' and we must keep all parishioners informed. (United we stand-divided we fall is so true). ... (61-80)

"Bike racks. Also mums might appreciate space to put prams." (26-40)

"The (Leeds City) Council will paint disabled car parking spaces on road outside west door if asked. This should be sufficient. ..." (41-60)

" What a fabulous idea. Lots of thoughts (and prayers) have goon into this. Good luck." (61-80)

"I feel that the proposals will move the church and the community forward. I think that the proposals are exactly what we as a church need." (41-60)

### **Our Next Steps**

Both the quantitative and qualitative results from this initial consultation indicate members of the parish agree that they want St Edward's to develop into a parish that ensures it's sustainability for many years to come. We are encouraged by the interest shown by the parish through the participation of its members and the results allow us to continue with the next steps on this journey.

Although we have made every effort to include as many parishioners as possible at this early stage, we need to be able to reach all members of St Edward's parish as the planning stages advance. This can only be accomplished if those who say they are part of St Edwards parish register as supporting members. We hope that a registration system will be in place prior to future consultations.