

Consultation on the Future of Catholic Life in Glossop

Parish Merger and Church Provision Review

Prepared for: Glossop Catholic Parishes and the Diocese of Nottingham

Prepared by: Ron Lynch KSG

Date: 9th May 2026

Confidentiality Note

This report has been prepared to support parish and Diocesan discernment and decision-making. It reflects the views expressed by parishioners during the consultation process and seeks to present them accurately, fairly, and without attribution to individuals.

Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Background and Context
3. Consultation Methodology
4. Analysis of Consultation Group Feedback
5. Analysis of Questionnaire Responses
6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Appendices

- [i] Letter announcing the consultation and inviting participation
- [ii] Finance committee handout
- [iii] Observations on the impact of various scenarios
- [iv] External stakeholders invited to participate
- [v] Note about liabilities that will fall due if the plans to redevelop St Mary Crowned do not proceed
- [vi] Observations on potential futures uses for the church buildings in Glossop.pdf
- [vii] List of additional documents in the dossier submitted to Bishop Patrick

1. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the consultation on the future of Catholic life in Glossop, drawing on facilitated consultation group discussions and completed parish questionnaires. Together, these sources provide a balanced account of the views of participating parishioners regarding the proposed formation of a single parish and the future use of church buildings.

Context and Purpose

The consultation was undertaken in response to a diocesan-wide process initiated by Bishop Patrick McKinney, Bishop of Nottingham, to ensure that parish structures are sustainable, outward-facing and mission-oriented. In Glossop, this involved exploring the proposed merger of two parishes and identifying a single church building to serve the united parish. Parishioners were invited to contribute through a structured and inclusive process designed to support reflection, dialogue and discernment.

Overall Position

There was strong overall support for the formation of a single parish, with many parishioners recognising that the communities already functioned in a largely unified way. The proposal was widely accepted as a realistic response to a decline in Mass attendance (albeit with a recent modest increase), reduced clergy availability, financial pressures and the need for a more sustainable future.

Support was not unanimous. A minority of parishioners expressed concern or opposition, particularly in relation to the loss of a church building, accessibility, and the potential impact on parish identity. This highlights the need for careful pastoral leadership and clear communication as the process moves forward.

Key Findings

1. No clear consensus on suitable church building

Neither the consultation groups nor questionnaire respondents identified a single preferred church. Views were balanced, with each building seen as having distinct strengths and challenges.

All Saints was generally regarded as more economical and manageable, and better aligned with current congregation size.

St Mary Crowned was valued for its capacity, central location, accessibility and strong links with local Catholic schools.

2. Financial sustainability is a concern

A consistent theme across all responses was the need to ensure long-term financial viability. In particular, St Mary Crowned was widely perceived as costly to maintain and larger than current needs require, while All Saints was seen as more sustainable in operational terms.

3. Pastoral function and mission

Parishioners emphasised that the decision should not be based on buildings alone, but on what best supports worship and liturgy, community life and participation, evangelisation and outreach, and engagement with families and younger people. This indicated some tension between sustainability and pastoral effectiveness.

4. Accessibility and inclusion

Accessibility was a significant consideration, particularly for elderly parishioners and those without transport. The location of the chosen church would directly affect participation, pastoral care and inclusion.

5. Relationship with schools

Strong links with local Catholic schools were seen as essential for faith formation, youth engagement and the long-term vitality of the parish. St Mary Crowned was felt to be more closely associated with school life, and this would be an important factor in decision-making.

6. Heritage, identity and community

Both churches were recognised as having significant historical, architectural and emotional value. Parishioners wished to respect and preserve heritage, maintain a sense of continuity and belonging, and avoid unnecessary loss or displacement. At the same time, there was support for developing a unified parish identity.

7. Opportunity for renewal

A strong theme throughout the consultation was that merger represents an opportunity for renewed parish life, stronger community identity, more effective use of resources, growth in participation, especially among families and young people, and a more outward-looking, mission-focused Church.

8. Openness to future options

Parishioners showed some openness to exploring alternatives beyond simply retaining one existing church, including site redevelopment, shared use, or longer-term strategic solutions.

9. Importance of process and communication

There was a clear expectation that decisions should be transparent and based on clear criteria, well communicated and pastorally sensitive. The process by which decisions will be made was seen as critical to maintaining trust and unity.

Conclusion

The consultation reflected a parish community that was thoughtful, realistic and open to change, while also being aware of the implications of the decisions to be made. At the heart of the findings was a strategic question:

Which option will best sustain and develop Catholic life in Glossop, while balancing financial sustainability with pastoral effectiveness, accessibility and future growth?

There was no simple or universally supported solution. Any decision would require careful discernment, taking account of sustainability, mission and evangelisation, accessibility and inclusion, relationships with schools, and heritage and identity.

Parishioners indicated that they were prepared to accept a challenging outcome, provided it was clearly explained, fairly and transparently reached, pastorally sensitive, and focused on the long-term flourishing of the Church.

Final Reflection

The consultation provides a foundation for the next stage of discernment and decision-making. It reflects a parish community that is realistic, thoughtful and willing to move forward.

2. Background and Context

The consultation arose from a diocesan-wide review of parish provision, intended to ensure that parish structures are sustainable, mission-oriented and capable of responding to the pastoral realities of the future.

Short excerpt from the Bishop's letter

In the specific context of Glossop, I am asking you to begin consultations with your parishes and the wider community about the viability of having two Catholic parishes and churches in the town, and looking to reduce these, through an extinctive union, into one single parish with one church for the entire town... I would ask that the consultation also realistically considers which of the current two churches would best serve a single parish in Glossop as its single place of worship, and what might be done with the other church.

Purpose of the letter

The Bishop's letter set the local consultation within the wider diocesan review and invited Glossop parishioners to consider, as widely and realistically as possible, the challenges and opportunities arising from the two parishes being united, and which church building would best serve a single future parish.

Parishioners received copies of the letter, further information from Fr Martin Sylvester and the Finance Committee, and invitations to participate in consultation group meetings. A questionnaire was also made available for those who preferred to submit their views in that way.

3. Consultation Methodology

Approach

A mixed-method approach was used to ensure both breadth and depth of feedback, combining structured data collection with reflective group dialogue.

1. Consultation Group Discussions

Three facilitated group sessions were held using the *Conversations in the Spirit* approach, a structured method of dialogue rooted in prayer, attentive listening and shared discernment. Participants were invited to:

- reflect personally on each question
- share their insights without interruption
- listen carefully to the contributions of others
- identify emerging themes and areas of convergence

This approach encouraged openness and mutual respect, enabling participants to move beyond debate and contribute to a process of collective discernment.

The discussions explored key questions relating to:

- concerns and opportunities arising from merger and church closure
- the suitability of both church buildings
- priorities for mission and parish life
- future vision and hopes for the parish

Outcomes from the group discussions were recorded on cards and flipcharts for later review and analysis.

2. Written and Recorded Feedback

Parishioners were also invited to submit written or recorded responses. This enabled participation from those unable to attend group sessions and ensured that a wider range of voices could be included.

3. Parish Questionnaires

A structured questionnaire was distributed to obtain individual responses in a consistent format. It included:

- agreement or disagreement with forming one parish
- views on parish identity and naming
- perceived advantages and disadvantages of each church
- suggestions for future use of buildings and alternative options

Participation

The consultation engaged a broad cross-section of parishioners, including regular Mass attendees and those involved in parish life. Participation was voluntary, and efforts were made to ensure that the process was open and inclusive.

Analysis

All responses were collated and reviewed in full. The analysis:

- identified key themes, areas of agreement and differing views
- removed duplication while retaining the substance of responses
- reflected both majority opinion and minority perspectives

Limitations

The consultation reflects the views of those who chose to participate and may not represent all parishioners. However, the consistency of themes across multiple contributions provided a reliable basis for discernment.

Conclusion

The methodology enabled a wide range of views to be gathered in a structured, reflective and balanced way, supporting informed and transparent discussion about the future of Catholic life in Glossop.

4. Analysis of Consultation Group Feedback

This section summarises the responses to the questions considered by the consultation groups, with recurring themes grouped together.

Overall Results from the Consultation

There was substantial support for coming together as one parish, with most participants confirming that, in practice, the two church communities already share much of their life and activity. Many saw merger as a realistic and positive step in the light of limited clergy, volunteer fatigue, financial pressures and the desire for a more sustainable future.

At the same time, the consultation showed that this was not simply an administrative matter. Mission, outreach, sustainability, choice of church building, effect on schools, emotional attachment to place, accessibility for elderly parishioners and those with restricted mobility, and the heritage significance of the buildings were all seen as important. A central theme was not only which building should remain open, but what kind of future Glossop Catholics could build.

Key Themes Emerging from the Consultation Questions

Question 1: What are our biggest fears or worries about coming together as one parish?

General mood

Most people had little or no objection to merger. Some felt that “we are together already” and that formal merger would simply recognise the present reality.

Main concerns raised

a) Uncertainty and lack of clarity

The greatest concern was often not the merger itself, but the uncertainty surrounding it. People were anxious about how long the process would take, what criteria would be used, which building might close¹, and what would happen next.

b) Loss of identity and emotional attachment

People recognised strong personal and family attachments to both churches. These buildings were seen not merely as assets, but as places of memory, sacrament, belonging and grief.

c) Impact on Mass attendance and parish life

There was concern that closing one church could lead to some parishioners drifting away, especially where travel, routine, age or loyalty to a particular place were significant factors.

d) School impact

A specific concern was raised regarding St Philip Howard School. Some indicated that, if St Mary Crowned was to close, pupils and staff would lose the existing opportunities for planned attendance at Holy Mass each Thursday in the school week and at other times.

e) Financial uncertainty

People expressed concern not only about the cost of keeping one church open, but also about the possible ongoing consequences of closing the other, including maintenance, security, repurposing or disposal. It was noted that the non-trivial cost of maintaining a closed listed church would continue to fall on the parish.

¹ In this report, the terms ‘close’ and ‘closing’ refer to a church building no longer used for worship

f) Accessibility and transport

Transport was repeatedly raised as a barrier to Mass attendance. Concerns included limited public transport, the need to review Mass times, and the difficulty for parishioners who do not drive.

Question 2: Which of the two churches is best suited to our needs now and in the future?

Overview

The consultation did not show complete consensus but suggested a framework for considering the question.

All Saints RC Church, Old Glossop

All Saints is a church of considerable historic and architectural significance. Built in 1836 in Greek Revival style and funded by the 12th Duke of Norfolk, it is an important expression of the early Catholic Revival.

Perceived strengths of All Saints

- smaller and potentially more manageable in scale
- lower apparent maintenance burden than St Mary Crowned
- close links with the Catholic primary school
- strong historic significance and distinct architectural character
- seen by some as adequate for projected future numbers

Perceived challenges of All Saints

- smaller capacity if future growth is a serious aim
- less central for some parishioners
- transport and accessibility concerns
- listed status means adaptation may not be simple or inexpensive

St Mary Crowned, Glossop

St Mary Crowned, built in 1882-87 in Early English Gothic Revival style to serve the growing working population of the mill town, is a landmark building in the conservation area.

Perceived strengths of St Mary Crowned

- larger building with greater capacity
- central role in the life of the town
- strong relationship with St Philip Howard School
- parish hall nearby
- possible flexibility for wider parish, cultural or community use
- regarded by some as better able to accommodate future growth

Perceived challenges of St Mary Crowned

- substantial maintenance, heating and lighting costs due to its scale
- Parking on Sundays would be difficult and potentially disruptive to neighbours if the car park at St Philip Howard School ceases to be available as a result of the school being rebuilt on another site
- as a large listed urban church, adaptation may be expensive

Views and questions arising from the responses

People indicated that practical and pastoral considerations should guide decision-making

- financial sustainability
- support for mission and parish life
- service to schools and families
- suitability for adaptation and outreach,
- realistic future of the building not retained

It was also clear that neither building was regarded as suitable without some investment.

Question 3: What opportunities do we see in coming together as one parish?

Overview

This was one of the strongest and most positive sections of the consultation.

a) Greater unity and stronger identity

Participants believed that a united parish could create a stronger Catholic presence in Glossop, with a clearer sense of shared purpose, mission and identity.

b) More effective use of people and resources

A merged parish was seen as a way of reducing duplication and spreading the workload more effectively across ministries and practical parish tasks.

c) Renewal and growth

Some saw merger not as a response to decline, but as an opportunity for a fresh start, including better organised parish life, broader opportunities for worship, outreach, family-friendly development and stronger volunteer culture.

d) Youth, children and schools

There was strong support for youth groups and activities, children's liturgy, closer links with schools, greater involvement of parents, and making the parish more engaging for younger people.

e) Mission and evangelisation

Some responses called for a parish that was not merely welcoming to current parishioners, but more missionary, outward-looking and intentional in evangelisation.

f) Focused stewardship

People saw merger as a route to more effective utilisation of money, buildings, clergy time and volunteer effort in support of mission.

Question 4: What elements are most important to develop?

Overview

Responses suggested that the future of the parish would depend less on the structural decision itself and more on practical, liturgical and pastoral development.

a) Mass times

Mass times were frequently mentioned, with calls for review in light of one priest serving fewer churches, the needs of families, transport realities, attendance patterns, and the possibility of better-attended liturgies rather than thinly spread congregations.

b) Ministries

A strong theme was that ministries matter more than buildings alone. Priority areas included liturgy, welcome, outreach, evangelisation, lay involvement and support for the sick, elderly and isolated.

c) Buildings

Whichever building remained open would require thought about comfort, maintenance, accessibility, welcome space, facilities for families and children, provision for musicians and priest, and suitability for wider parish use.

d) School and parish links

The parish's relationship with schools was seen as central to future vitality. The possible effect of church closure on school Masses, children's faith formation and family engagement should form part of the discernment.

Question 5: How might we make everyone feel at home in a united parish?

Overview

This question generated many practical and pastorally rich suggestions.

a) Stronger ministry of welcome

People wanted to see an ongoing development in the existing efforts to build a genuinely warm and proactive welcome at Mass, including welcomers, name badges, hospitality, support for newcomers and personal contact.

b) Shared social life

Suggestions included expanding the existing provision of tea and coffee after Mass, parish social events, meals and barbecues, and activities beyond Sunday liturgy. The aim was to create fellowship, not simply attendance.

c) Leaving old labels behind

Many felt that a united parish identity, possibly including a new parish name, would help people move beyond thinking in terms of "St Mary's people" or "All Saints people".

d) Communication

Communication needed to be regular, clear and suited to different age groups, using personal contact as well as digital means where appropriate.

e) Participation and belonging

People feel at home when they are needed, known and involved. Encouraging people to contribute their gifts and serve in ministries was therefore seen as central to building unity.

Question 6: What would Catholic life in Glossop look like after five years of committed effort?

Realism

There was awareness that congregations were ageing, that numbers may continue to fall unless something changes, and that growth will not happen automatically.

Hopeful vision

At the same time, many people imagined a parish that in five years could be vibrant, united, mission-focused, more welcoming, more family-friendly, better attended, stronger in ministry, more confident in faith and more visible in the town.

Emerging theme

The future should be shaped by mission, evangelisation and community.

Main Conclusions

- There was support for becoming one parish, with many people already seeing the parish communities as effectively united.
- The real question was sustainability in mission and not simply which building people preferred, but which arrangements would best support worship, schools, mission, welcome, volunteer life, financial sustainability and pastoral care.
- Both church buildings had significant strengths and significant challenges, and discernment should recognise heritage value, emotional attachment, practical use, maintenance costs, school links, accessibility and future growth potential.
- People wanted renewal, not only rationalisation. Responses showed a desire for a parish that is more united, more missionary, more welcoming and more attractive to younger people and families.
- A clear process, clear criteria and regular communication will be crucial as discernment progresses.

5. Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

This section complements the consultation group findings by reviewing the individual questionnaire responses and testing whether the same themes emerged through a more structured format.

Overall Position

There was majority support for forming a single parish, with many respondents recognising the practical benefits of unity and shared resources. However, support was not unanimous, and a small minority expressed concern or opposition, indicating the need for sensitive pastoral handling.

Key Findings

1. No clear consensus on church building choice

The questionnaires did not identify a preferred single church. Instead, they showed a balanced division of opinion, with each building associated with distinct advantages and drawbacks.

2. Financial sustainability as the dominant concern

The most consistent and strongly expressed view across the questionnaire responses was that St Mary Crowned presents significant financial challenges, particularly in relation to heating, maintenance and overall running costs.

3. Strengths of All Saints

All Saints was widely regarded as more economical to maintain and of a manageable size² for current and projected congregation levels. This made it the stronger option in terms of long-term sustainability.

4. Strengths of St Mary Crowned

St Mary Crowned was consistently valued for its capacity³ for large liturgies and parish events, its central location and accessibility, and its strong connection to local Catholic schools.

5. Accessibility as a critical factor

Concerns were raised about the ability of some parishioners, particularly the elderly or those without transport, to access All Saints. This was seen as a significant consideration for inclusion and pastoral care.

6. Schools and future growth

The relationship between St Mary Crowned and local schools emerged as an important factor, particularly regarding school Masses, youth engagement and future parish vitality.

7. Preference for alternative solutions

Several respondents preferred alternatives beyond retaining one existing building, including a new central church, shared or multi-use facilities, and redevelopment options including a shared campus with the secondary school. It was noted that the only options offered for consideration were the retention of one or another of the existing churches.

8. Identity and heritage

There was a clear desire to retain continuity with existing parish identities, whether through naming or recognition of heritage. Emotional and historical attachments were significant, though generally balanced against practical considerations.

Conclusion

Although the number of questionnaire responses was limited, the themes that emerged were broadly consistent with those raised in the consultation groups. The questionnaire evidence highlighted a tension regarding the choice between a financially sustainable and manageable building at All Saints, and a larger, more central church at St Mary Crowned that may be better suited to pastoral activity and school engagement.

Respondents were broadly open to change, provided that any decision was transparent and well communicated, pastorally sensitive, and grounded in long-term sustainability and mission. Overall, the responses suggest a community willing to move forward, provided that the decision clearly supports the future vitality of Catholic life in Glossop rather than focusing on the preservation of buildings.

² In a fire risk assessment received after the consultation meetings and questionnaires, a maximum capacity of 60 persons was imposed for All Saints, rising to 100 if trained fire marshals are on duty at each exit for the duration of any event.

³ In a fire risk assessment received after the consultation meetings and questionnaires, a maximum capacity of 120 persons was imposed at St Mary Crowned, rising to 342 if trained fire marshals are on duty at each exit for the duration of any event.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Drawing together the evidence from both the consultation groups and the questionnaires, this section sets out the principal conclusions and recommendations arising from the consultation process.

- The consultation indicated that parishioners were supportive of forming a single parish in Glossop, recognising the need to respond to declining attendance, reduced clergy numbers and financial pressures.
- However, the decision about church buildings was potentially complex, with no single option gaining full support. The choice would need to balance financial sustainability and manageability with pastoral effectiveness, accessibility and engagement with schools and the wider community.
- Parishioners clearly recognised that this was not simply a decision about buildings, but about the future vitality and mission of the Church in Glossop.

The following factors should guide decision-making

- Sustainability: ensuring that any arrangement is financially viable and appropriate to current and future needs.
- Mission and parish life: supporting worship, community life, evangelisation and participation, particularly among families and younger people.
- Accessibility and inclusion: enabling participation for all parishioners, especially the elderly and those without transport.
- Schools and future growth: maintaining strong links with local Catholic schools to support faith formation and long-term parish vitality.
- Heritage and identity: respecting the historical and emotional significance of both churches and preserving a sense of continuity.
- Future of the building not retained: addressing ongoing responsibilities, including maintenance, potential alternative use, heritage obligations and financial implications.
- Process and communication: ensuring clarity, transparency and ongoing engagement to maintain trust and unity.

Recommendations

- Proceed with the formation of a single parish in Glossop, subject to diocesan approval.
- Determine the most suitable church building using clear and transparent criteria that balance sustainability, mission, accessibility and links with schools.
- Develop a transition plan including pastoral support for parishioners, opportunities to build a shared parish identity, and clear communication of decisions and timelines.
- Prioritise renewal of parish life, with particular focus on strengthening welcome and community life.
- Develop ministries and lay involvement, engaging children, young people and families, and supporting evangelisation and outreach.
- Strengthen and build on existing links with local Catholic schools as a key element of future parish vitality.
- Ensure ongoing communication and engagement throughout the process to support unity and shared ownership of the parish's future.

Final Reflection

The consultation provided a strong foundation for the next stage of discernment and decision-making. It reflected a community that is realistic about the need for change and willing to move forward, if decisions are clearly explained, fairly reached, pastorally sensitive and focused on the long-term flourishing of Catholic life in Glossop.

Appendices

- [i] Letter announcing the consultation and inviting participation
- [ii] Finance committee handout
- [iii] Observations on the impact of various scenarios
- [iv] External stakeholders invited to participate
- [v] Note about liabilities that will fall due if the plans to redevelop St Mary Crowned do not proceed
- [vi] Observations on potential futures uses for the church buildings in Glossop.pdf
- [vii] List of additional documents in the dossier submitted to Bishop Patrick