

The Inspire Project: Consulting our Community

Survey Results – October 2023

Between May and July this year, we undertook a survey of people in the St John's community. 135 people responded to the survey and the findings show how much people in the Ranmoor community enjoy the building, music and community of St John's. But they also present the challenges people have with our building and the hopes they have for increased use of the building.

The first question asked "how often have you visited St John's in the last 12 months?". Just over half the respondents have visited at least once a month in the last year. 14% have visited once or twice in the last year and 3% had never visited St John's.

In response to the question "how connected do you feel to St John's", 77% of respondents gave it a score of 3 or more out of 5, of which 32% gave the highest score of 5. Respondents were also asked "how do you know about events and services at St John's?" More than half of the respondents receive the weekly notices, 34% receive Inspire magazine and 25% follow St John's on social media. 22.3% of the respondents don't receive any regular news from St John's but lots said that they hear from family or friends about what's going on.

There was a huge range of responses to the question "what do you like about St John's?". Lots of respondents made reference to the building itself, with 24 responses including the word "beautiful" and many others making positive comments about the architecture and other features of the building. One respondent remarked "the peace and quiet in the majestic building allows time for thought and contemplation". Lots of respondents also reflected positively on the worship at St John's, one person said "services are easy to follow as well as conveying a good message" and another commented that they "value the liturgy".

For many respondents, St John's church is intrinsically linked to their faith journeys, one respondent said "my faith and St John's have been a constant the majority of my life" while another said "I have enjoyed reconnecting with the liturgy at the root of my faith". The safety and security that people find at St John's was also a common theme "I feel comfortable there. It's always the same, providing continuity even when life does not!". Many drew fondly on memories of St John's from years gone by; baptisms, weddings, singing as a chorister and visiting for school carol services. One respondent said "just seeing it makes me feel that I am home".

Music was also a significant theme; the choir, bells and organ were all included in the responses. One respondent said "the music is a great source of joy" and another commented "the choral music is excellent and precious". Lots acknowledged how the musical life of St John's enhances the worship – "the music is a spiritual resource".

More than anything else, the responses reflected how much people appreciate the sense of community at St John's. Lots of the respondents commented on "how friendly and welcoming everyone is". One person said "the warmth of the church community has been a huge support" and another said "everyone is very kind and welcoming". Our community values were also reflected in the responses including social justice and EcoChurch. One respondent said they appreciated "the social service minded congregation where religion is more than just worship in a building."

The responses to the question “is there anything you don’t like about St John’s?” were mainly focussed on the challenges of the building and the lack of facilities. Of the 53 responses, 18 specifically mentioned the limited provision of kitchen and toilet facilities. One respondent said the “lack of facilities like toilets makes it hard to use the space more flexibly and for those with disabilities”, and another said “the queues for the loo aren't great! Also that there is only one tap, so the coffee team have to use the bathroom tap for water.”

Other challenges of the building were also referenced including the heating, sound system and lighting with one respondent saying “the lighting is too poor”. The pews divided respondents. For some the pews were thing they don’t like about St John’s whereas others disliked any plans to remove the pews.

A handful of the responses mentioned disliking how closed the building seems during the week, one respondent said it “seems to be uninviting, and to all intents and purposes, appears to be closed through the day” and another said “there’s not enough community use of the building”.

More activities and broader uses of the building were key themes in response to the question “is there anything that would encourage you to visit more frequently?”. One respondent said they’d like more “live music - classical concerts such as the ones Ensemble 360 put on in town would be fantastic. What a stunning setting to hear world class music”. Another person said they’d like “exhibition space and the ability to hold different types of events”. Lots of other people would visit St John’s more frequently if we had more arts events, talks, exhibitions and performances. Others would come along to coffee mornings or visit a café if we had one, and some wanted more community activities, such as natter groups and craft mornings.

Several of the responses also wanted us to offer more things for families. One respondent said they’d like “a bigger range of social events which are more suited to families”. Others would visit more if there were “more frequent children's service” and “more focus around attracting younger members to the congregation”. Some people would also visit more frequently if there were “more Bible study groups in the church” and “more discussion-based things, book club/bible study”.

The survey also asked about heritage activities. 111 people answered this question with 79% interested in attending Heritage Open Days, 58% interested in attending heritage talks and 47% interested in church tours.

Unsurprisingly, given previous responses, 59 of the responses said that toilets were needed to make the building better suited for community use, with an improved kitchen coming a close second. Lots of people also suggested making the building more flexible – one person suggested “moveable pews and space at the back of the church” and another said “more flexible seating would be good but it needs to be very carefully chosen so the design harmonises with the lovely building”. But there were also several people that said “it is fine as it is and does not need to be changed”.

The final question asked “is there anything else you'd like to contribute about St John's Church and its role in the Ranmoor community?”. One person said “it's a beautiful church. I wish it was open more” whilst another said “it is really important it remains viable and open to all people of all faith backgrounds and no faith”. Another said it should be the “heart of the community, if there are events happening in local schools or businesses, the church should be the first port of call” – what a wonderful thing that would be!

So what's next...? The survey was carried out to better understand what people think of St John's and its facilities and to inform plans for the Inspire Project. The survey will help us to develop the business case for undertaking work to improve the building and will be vital evidence for the applications for planning consent and faculties (the process for changing church buildings). It will also be important evidence as we begin to think about approaching funders who might help us make some of the changes that people would like in our building. The Inspire Project Group and the PCC will be reviewing all of the responses (not just those referred to here) and, with our Architect, begin to put some plans together to improve the building.