

St. Mary's Church & Cottonstones Community Centre



Survey Results

September 2025

Summary of Survey Findings

1. Cottonstones Community Centre

- Ninety percent of respondents strongly support having a local social hub.
- Only two-thirds know about the centre's facilities—indicating room for better publicity.
- Popular past events included quiz nights, Christmas carols, wreath-making, fitness/dance classes, and heritage events.

Suggestions for Future Use:

- Social events: Coffee mornings, family celebrations, seasonal festivals. •
- Creative/educational: art, music, heritage exhibitions, book club/festival. •
- Youth & families: toddler groups, play sessions, youth club.
- Community services: café, plant/produce sales, drop-in space.

Other Feedback:

- Promote via mailing lists, social media, WhatsApp.
- Establish a strong volunteer group.
- Mixed-use model (community + commercial) for financial sustainability. •
- Improve facilities and accessibility.
- Collaborate with St Mary's School to host events.

2. St Mary's Church

- Nearly all respondents live within 3 miles.
- Nearly a half attended in the past year, another 25% attended in the past but not recently.
- Attendance reasons include tradition, events, and festivals; barriers include time, health, or not knowing others attending.

Suggestions to Increase Attendance:

- Earlier Sunday service times (38%).
- Varied worship styles (38%).
- Improved information and communication (24%).

Communication Preferences:

- Newsletter (70%), Email list (63%), WhatsApp (43%).

Impact of Possible Closure:

- Strong emotional attachment and cultural ties were expressed.
- Closure would sadden many and be seen as a loss of heritage, a blow to community spirit and a loss of opportunity.

- A few pragmatic voices questioned cost sustainability and suggested alternatives (e.g. relocation, repurposing).

Recommendations

For the Community Centre:

- Maintain dialogue with the Church of England.
- Strengthen and expand the current community volunteer group.
- Create a sustainable plan for programming and finances.
- Seek grants/funding, renovate facilities.
- Build local partnerships with school, businesses, and other groups.

For the Church:

- Consider different styles of worship.
- Re-assess the church's potential as a place of community importance.
- Promote and publicise the use of the church for Baptisms, Weddings and Funeral services, focusing on social media to improve communication.
- Conduct more in-depth consultation.
- Continue to encourage the greater use of the community centre to encourage greater use of the church.

Conclusion

- Despite the modest response rate, there is clear support for reviving the community centre and concern over potential church closure.
- The village is experiencing a renewed community spirit, which can be harnessed for revitalisation efforts.
- Success will depend on volunteer energy, financial planning, and continued Church involvement.

Main Report

A survey was carried out in June 2025 to gauge support and interest in the future uses of the Church and Community Centre. The Community Centre has been little used in recent years and fewer people now attend Church services.

The Community Centre has a new village group, whose volunteer members have been working to revive and expand the use of the centre. There has been positive

feedback from well-attended Quiz nights, informal carol singing, heritage events, period dance and other functions, in addition to a keep fit class. A local councillor has also begun to hold surgeries for constituents at the centre.

Decisions about the future of the church and community centre are in the hands of the Church of England, and the information gathered about local support is designed to help the Church in the process of making its decisions.

Method

Volunteers from the St Mary's Church and Cottonstones Community Centre Group designed, distributed and analysed the questionnaire results. A paper questionnaire was delivered to around 200 households and distributed at community events.

An online questionnaire was created using a survey tool and shared on the village's WhatsApp group, on the website, via social media, and in the newsletter. The questionnaire was also shared with local community groups and organizations.

Response Rate: A total of 42 responses were received. This represents a response rate of 20.5%. This rate is not particularly unusual for consultations of this kind, and although quite low, is still well worth reporting with an understanding of its limitations.

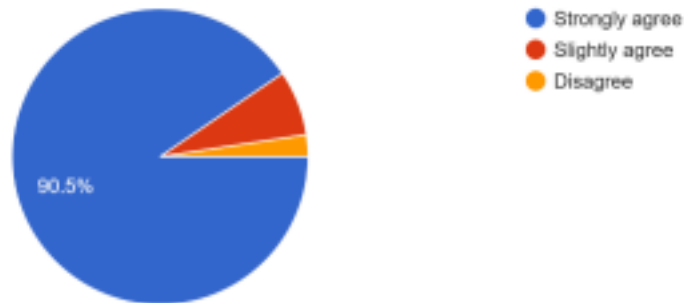
Results Analysis: The data were analysed using statistical software to identify levels of interest and preferences among multiple choice options. Open text responses were grouped by frequency of theme and summarised with quotations to illustrate typical responses.

Limitations and Further Research

Every effort was made to invite responses from households in the villages and close surrounding area, but at 20%, the response rate may not be representative of the entire community. This is typical of surveys of this kind, and it may be productive to follow up with further investigation, in focused face-to-face discussion.

Q1. Do you agree that the village and surrounding areas need a social hub where community events can take place?

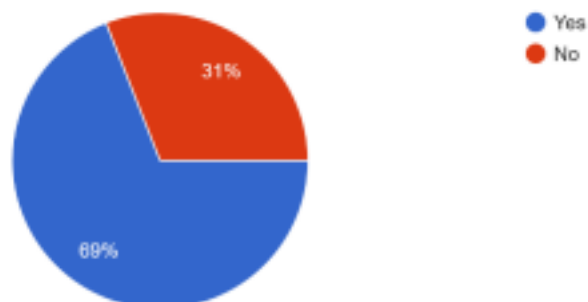
42 responses



Nine out of ten people who responded strongly agreed on the need for a social hub.

Q2. Are you aware of the spaces currently for hire at the community centre (office/workshop, large and smaller rooms, kitchen facilities)?

42 responses



Just over two thirds of people who responded were aware of the centre's facilities, suggesting that better publicity and promotion of the centre's use could be beneficial in stimulating its use.

The community centre is currently used for occasional community activities, including fitness, dance and social events. In addition to the annual Rushbearing ceremony, the introduction of community Christmas Carol singing and Quiz Nights have also proved to be popular and well attended.

Q3. How do you think the community centre could be used to its best effect?

This question invited respondents to give their views and ideas in open text form. The key points can be summarised as follows:

- **Social events and gatherings:** suggestions from 22 people included regular social functions like quiz nights, coffee mornings, family events, suppers, seasonal celebrations, birthday parties, and New Year's celebrations.
- **Creative and educational activities:** suggestions from 12 people included art groups, music events, dance, a book exchange corner, heritage exhibitions, craft sessions, cinema nights, speaker visits, and a book festival.
- **Children and Young People's activities:** Suggestions from 9 people included a youth club, baby and toddler groups, playgroups, and family-friendly events.
- **Community services:** suggestions from 19 people included a drop-in centre, community café, continuation of keep-fit sessions, a community shop, and sales of plants and produce.

2. Improving Awareness and Engagement

- A significant number of respondents are unaware of the centre's existence or facilities.
- Suggestions for better **promotion** include mailing lists, Facebook updates, and WhatsApp groups.
- A need for a **strong, dedicated group** to run and promote the centre was emphasized.

3. Facilities and Practical Considerations

- There is potential for **mixed-use**, with both commercial and community oriented activities. There is a charity that advises on the development of community properties and a branch of the C of E who do the same.
- The centre could serve as a **neutral, accessible space** for local gatherings and events.
- A mix of **free and paid** bookings was suggested to keep the centre self sustaining.
- **Improved publicity, advertising** and outreach are needed to encourage broader use.

4. School and Church Collaboration

- One suggestion recommended stronger links between St Mary's village school and church/community space to host more school events there, alleviating parking and traffic issues in Mill Bank on special occasions.

5. History and Potential

- The centre has previously been used for a wide range of activities: worship, school events, dances, toddler groups, charity events.
- Respondents suggested **reinvigorating the space** for modern community needs by building on this legacy.

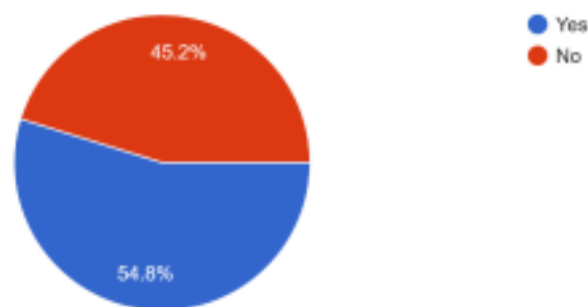
Q4. Do you know any groups which may be interested in using the community centre on a one off or regular basis?

There were 19 responses to this question. One respondent said yes, but “access is an issue”; another said it would depend on what type of events/meetings are permitted.

Suggestions included:

Ryburn Valley Pony Club, Young Farmers, Calderdale Saddle Club, The Cottonstones Toad Patrol, Quiz Nights and the History Group (perhaps with a heritage art exhibition)

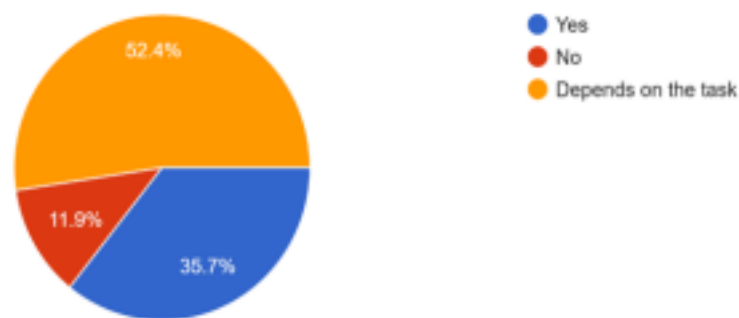
Q5. A community centre group is being formed to plan events, fundraise, take bookings and maximise general use of the space. Is this something you would be interested in being involved in?
42 responses



Over half of those responding expressed an interest in belonging to a group planning and managing events at the centre.

Q6. Would you be interested in working alongside the group and other volunteers to help support the smooth running of the Community centre?

42 responses



Just over a third of respondents expressed interest in volunteering to help run the community centre, with a further third indicating that they might, depending on the tasks involved.

Discussion of Results

Amongst the 20% of people who responded, nearly all agreed on the need for a social hub. With the loss of the last village pub, there is simply nowhere else immediately local (and non-profit making) where people can gather to socialise, enjoy craft or other creative group activities; play games or hold a party. There is no home to display the well-researched history of the area. For social events, even a modest celebration at local pubs can be too expensive for many, and beyond the means of others.

In earlier years the villages had a strong tradition as places where people knew each other and socialised together - from "at homes", to the village choir, to the seven pubs that once existed. In recent times – particularly during and after the Covid pandemic - there has been a remarkable upturn in communications, community action, and mutual support. The Christmas Fairs, Quiz Nights, and informal carol singing are examples; there is brisk online trading and sharing of

goods, more shared information and even better security.

These are all encouraging signs that the community centre could build on the new level of community cooperation and attract more regular interest in a range of events and uses.

The church and its community centre are both an important centre of local history and are listed buildings well worth looking after for their historical interest and architectural value. The survey indicates a range of valued activities that might be supported, but there are challenges in moving forward; firstly, in setting up, organising, and publicising the right kind of events and facilities that would attract people to come regularly. The centre is not the most accessible of places and is in need of some renovation. Recent work and events have shown a promising level of

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local interest. Secondly, a thriving community centre would need to be financially sustainable – perhaps by promoting a mix of paid for and free activities, fund raising and by seeking grant funds.

Recommendations

It must be remembered that decisions about the church and community centre are ultimately for the Church.

- A first step is to **maintain contact with the church's decision-makers**, giving information about local views, seeking clarification about the process and timescales for making decisions about its future, and about terms and conditions if the community centre is to continue.

In the event that activities can continue at the community centre:

- Build on the current community group to **lead, encourage, and develop a plan** that reflects local interests, and is financially sustainable. The plan will need both vision for the medium term, as well as short term energy to create and publicise a programme that will attract as many people as possible to use the centre.
- Extend the current community centre group to **widen participation** to others who can bring ideas, skills and time to share responsibilities for running a programme of activities.
- **Establish the group** with an updated constitution and operating policies, so that it can function in an ordered way, raise funds, apply for grants, publicise and promote the centre. (This work is already in progress)
- **Find resources to expand and renovate** the facilities: for example, minor repairs, re-decoration, deep cleaning; the purchase of furniture, sports and other equipment; exhibition and educational resources; the improvement of kitchen facilities.

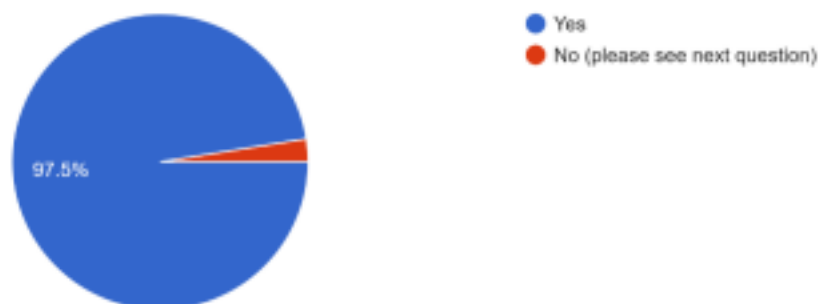
- **Build partnerships** to strengthen community involvement and commitment: for example, with St Mary's School, other community organisations and with local businesses.

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Results Part 2: 1. St Mary's Church

Q1. Do you live in St Mary's catchment area / within three miles of the Church?

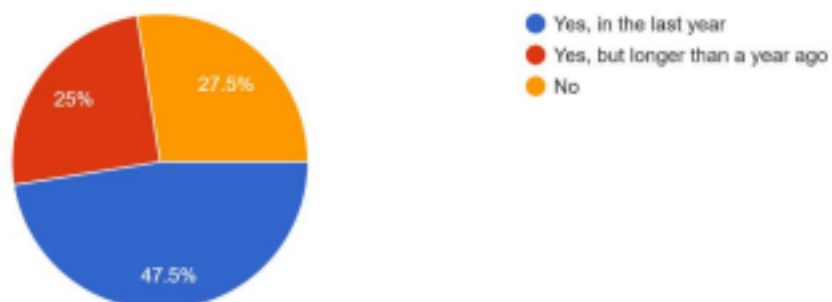
40 responses



All but 2% of those responding were living in the area, within 3 miles of the church.

Q2. Have you ever been to St Mary's for a service?

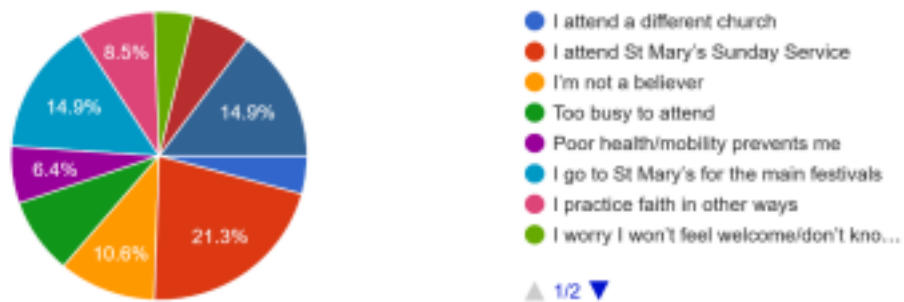
40 responses



Nearly a half of those responding said they had attended church in the last year, and a further quarter had done so, but not in the last year.

Q3. It's helpful to know why people do and don't attend church - some suggestions are below - you can tick as many as you like:

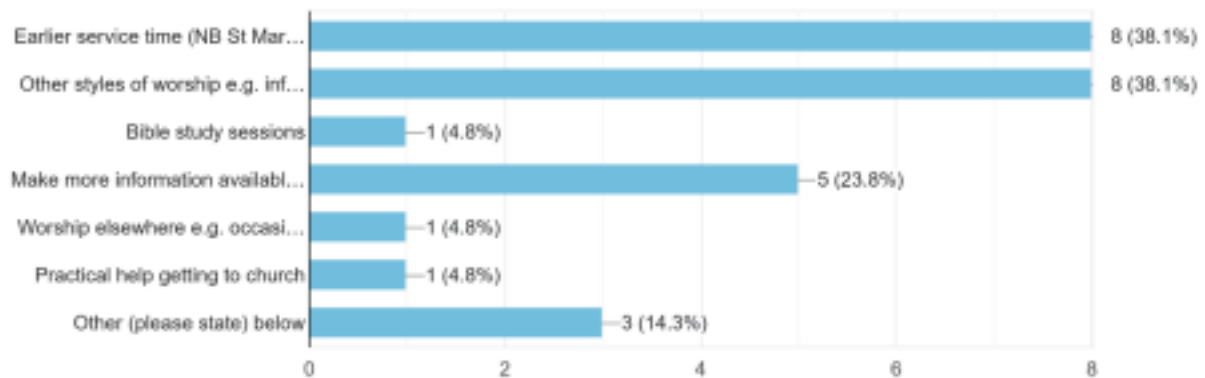
36 responses



Of those who responded (36), 21% said they attended, and a further 15% said they attended for the main church festivals. Others didn't attend for a variety of reasons: not being a believer, practicing faith in other ways, poor health, being too busy, or attending another church; two people were not sure if they would know anybody, or feel welcome.

Q4. What could we do to make it easier for you to attend church?

21 responses

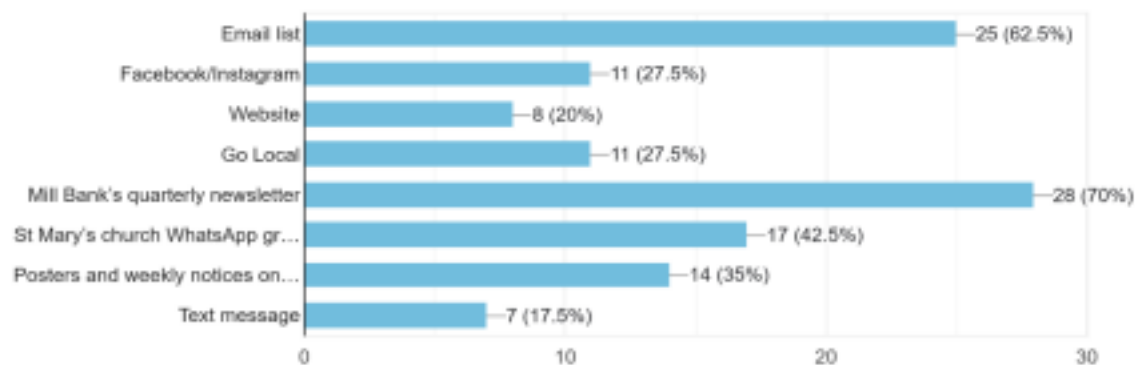


Twenty-one people responded to this question. The most common responses were to have an earlier Sunday service time (38%), introduce different styles of worship (38%) and to make more information available (24%).

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Q5. How would you like us to communicate with you to let you know St Mary's news and 'what's on'. Please tick the ones you prefer:

40 responses



Of the 40 people who responded, 70% preferred the Mill Bank Group Newsletter for communication; an email list was chosen by 63%; A WhatsApp group was preferred by 43% and a further 28% also preferred Facebook or Instagram. Just over a third ticked the box for posters and noticeboards.

Q6. If, due to a dwindling congregation, St Mary's had no choice but to close, how do you think this would impact you personally, and the wider community?

This question drew a high level of responses. 'Heart-broken', "sad", "disappointed", a "great shame" were typical, and most reported that the loss would affect them personally or the community in a negative way. Some examples of the impact of closure were:

"...my daughter was married there and my granddaughter christened. I was always planning that I would have my funeral there. I love walking up to church and the sense of community it gives me. For the wider community it would even further break the community spirit and with no Christmas service there would be less opportunities for children to learn about God."

"I would be very upset. The church is a very special and sentimental place for me and my family. The crib service every Christmas is also a wonderful occasion. I have grown up here, had my family here and the church has been part of it all for me. I know the community cares about having a 'hub' and also that lots of people feel the same way as me."

"It would be a great shame - both for churchgoers as well as historically and culturally the building is an important feature in the Soyland/Mill Bank landscape."

"I would be very sad. I have used it for personal parties and work events and enjoy being able to walk to it. It is the only community space which is accessible to most people in the local area".

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One respondent was optimistic about revival: "...we are on the foothills of re appraisal of the Church. Christianity is the New Punk...and I hope that the congregation continues to swell..."

Others were more pragmatic about the effort and cost that would be needed to keep the church open:

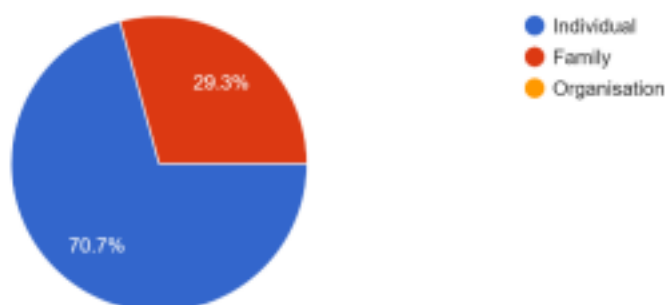
"I can't call for a use if I don't go to church or want facilities there. I know how expensive it is to keep up such a building which isn't the right shape size or construction for any other purpose. As a community facility it would be far too expensive to run, heat, maintain, so fundraising would have too much to cover before even starting to pay for the odd room or two. " ... "Perhaps efforts could be put into sharing space (at St Peter's) ... & creating a network of volunteer drivers or paid-for taxis to get Mill Bank people there for classes & functions."

"(housing could possibly) be a good use of the building"...especially if the funds from the sale of the Church were given to the community to build a community

centre in the village itself. ¹

Q7 Are you responding as an individual a family, or an organisation (if so, please specify):

41 responses



Seventy one percent of those responding did so as an individual, with 29% responding as a family.

Q8 Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

There were 7 responses to the digital version of the questionnaire. One included the suggestion:

"An exhibition of family photographs of times spent at the church with the whole village being asked to contribute would be a good starting point to get people in to see the exhibition and remember what church means to them. I am sure there must be some old wedding or christening photos. I think someone previous brought in their album from 1920. A big display in the church and invite everyone for cheese and wine to see it."

¹ Proceeds from the sale of a church invariably revert to the church authorities.

"The church and its history are very important to the village and its community, and we need to save it from closure if we can."

Discussion of Results

The church is currently used by a small group of regular attenders for Sunday worship, but a larger group also attends services at the main church festivals. There are some indications that different timing of services, and the introduction of different styles of worship might make attendance more attractive.

It is likely that the church is more widely valued by local people than the number of regular worshippers alone might suggest. One person commented: "The decline in the infrastructure of village life over the last 50 years (loss of shops, pubs, mills, dwindling bus service, small school intake) would be complete with the loss of the church. This will have a huge impact on the village now and for future generations".

Most reported that the loss of the church would be a great loss and a cause of

sadness. Some others did not respond or indicated that it would be a loss for the community, but not them personally.

Recommendations

1. Consider the introduction of **different styles of worship** that might encourage wider church attendance.
2. **Re-assess the church's value and potential** as a growing place of community importance in the light of recent growth of interest and attendance.
3. **Promote and publicise the use of the church** for Baptisms, Weddings and Funeral services, focusing on social media to improve communication.
4. **Conduct more in-depth consultation** to increase understanding of local views about the future of the church, including its sustainability.
5. Continue to **encourage the greater use of the community centre**; attendance at welcoming community events may help to encourage greater use of the church

Overall Conclusion

The questionnaire returns have brought helpful insights into the community's view about the future of the Church and the Community Centre. The group of people who responded represents around one fifth of all those who received the request, and we cannot make assumptions about the views of those who did not respond.

Within those limitations, there is clear agreement on the need for a community hub, and growing willingness to be involved. Recent initiatives to stimulate new activity at the community centre have been very successful and the work of the volunteer organisers greatly appreciated. These reflect a growing level of community activity, mutual support and cooperation in the village and local area.

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The results offer encouragement that the community centre could grow further and play a more prominent role in village life once again. Many people recognise that this will require leadership, planning, energy and commitment from volunteers, as well as financial resources.

According to the Church of England's own figures, levels of regular church attendance in England have not yet recovered to those before the Covid pandemic but have grown slightly over the past 4 years. Anecdotal evidence suggests a similar growth of interest locally, particularly at church festivals. There are some indications that changed service times and different styles of worship might attract more people to attend.

Recommendations for the community centre are offered with some confidence that they have the backing of the Mill Bank Group, which is active in the community, and has excellent communications that bring a good deal of knowledge of the

community's potential to move forward.

It is hoped that the survey will support the Church's decision to continue, change or close. Its loss would be a great blow to many who love the place and its history, and to many who visit; its continuation is likely to be better supported than in recent years and would add new momentum to the revival of community spirit that is taking place.