

VISION

RE-IMAGINING OUR BUILDINGS

First report from the
ROB Team

For Vision Sunday
29th September 2013

Dear Member of All Saints Weston,

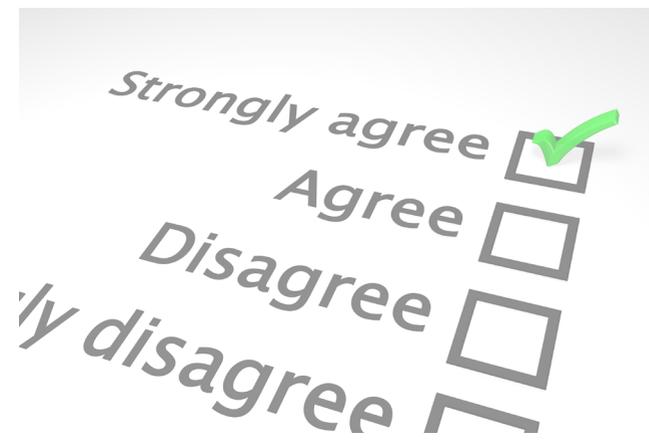
This is the first report from the Team that has been charged with 'Re-imagining Our Buildings' so that they continue well into the future, beyond most of us, to be a sign of God's activity in the world. So far, as a Team, we have mainly concentrated on the Church building but we are mindful of the other buildings in our care and will want eventually to see a 'plan' for all of them.

As a Team of eight we have met eight times. We have visited other churches in Bath that have gone through a process of change. We have listened to one another. We have read. We have prayed – and we are a little further down the road but we do not yet have a blueprint or set of detailed proposals to put to you. We are not going to rush ourselves or you!

A key task we have undertaken has been taking soundings from the church members, which we have mostly done through the survey.

Over 140 of you returned a completed form so we think we have a pretty good snapshot of the views of the congregation at the present time. You can see the results of the survey in this report. We have had scores of written comments and some of those comments are included. You won't be surprised to learn there is not 100% agreement

as to the direction of travel! The comments were varied and fascinating – some were passionate and very decided in their views. If you want a full set of comments they will be on the church website.



What we would ask of you as church members is to do the following:

Read this report carefully

- Whatever your views, try to understand the viewpoint and comments of those you might not agree with – keep an open mind
- Try not to ask the question ‘What do I prefer?’ Instead ask the question ‘What sort of building(s) will speak and function most strongly in the years to come and be a powerful resource in our mission to share the love of God with the community of Weston?’
- Engage in the conversations
- Remember in your prayers the Re-imagining Our Buildings Team as they seek to chart a way forward and present a vision for the future which will inspire and enthuse us all and keep the unity that we currently enjoy

Yours moving forward together,

Tom Kenyon

Chair of the Re-imagining Our Buildings (ROB) Team



SUMMARY

OUR STARTING POINTS

1. The church and the mission of the church is not a building or set of buildings. However buildings are important statements of the Christian faith and a vital means by which the church can give expression to its functions of worship, teaching, prayer, fellowship and mission.

2. All churches, like all buildings, send out a message to those who see them from the outside or go inside. We want the 'message' given out by the buildings of All Saints Weston to be one which helps to draw people into faith and growth in faith rather than the opposite.

3. Although church-buildings are of secondary importance, we know that people feel strongly about the way they should be and function. This is particularly true of traditional Anglican church buildings, many of which are hundreds of years old. This is true even for occasional church-goers who are often more 'conservative' about change than regular church-goers. This means that sensitivity is important when changes are proposed, even where there is a clear majority in favour of a particular change.

4. Unity and commitment from the whole congregation and beyond is very important; listening and walking in the other person's shoes is important. Majority opinion should not be a steamroller; nor should strongly held views by a minority prevent things happening (or not happening). Reaching complete agreement on all issues is unlikely but seeking to move forward together is a good principle to practise.

5. There has never been a single model (and certainly not a Biblical model) of what a Church building should be like. Church design has evolved and continues to evolve from the earliest days when Christians began to create special buildings for worship. These buildings have always reflected the prevailing theology of those who built them, and at the same time have been a reflection of the culture of the day. Even in the UK, thankfully, new church buildings are being built, older churches adapted and other buildings not originally built as churches are being used.

6. The position of the 'Church' and the Christian faith in general in the UK has changed dramatically in the past 50-60 years. The great majority of the population is now disconnected from Church. This means the emphasis on mission – both in terms of service and evangelism, is greater (and perhaps harder) than it has been for decades, perhaps centuries. Holding on to the essentials of our faith whilst adapting to the constant changes and competing cultures of 21st century UK – including Bath – is a huge challenge for Christians everywhere. That said, essentially this is no different from the challenge faced by Christians in any century or culture.

7. There has been a place of Christian worship on the site of the Weston parish church for around 900 years and possibly longer. The current building is probably the third church on the site and it has changed significantly since it opened in 1832, most of the changes coming in its first 80 years not its last 80 years! There is a responsibility on us to pass onto the next generation a building and a church community which has been well-maintained and which is not a museum or just a reflection of 'the way things were'.

8. As a listed building, there is no question of demolishing or greatly altering the exterior form or exterior appearance of the church, although the possibility of an appropriate extension to the building should not be ruled out.

9. Contemporary expectations (and sometimes statutory requirements) about comfort, accessibility, safety and toilets are very much greater than they were in previous generations. Christians from other centuries and in other parts of the world today might be shocked and disapprove, but the reality is we all expect our own homes and public buildings such as schools, workplaces, libraries, medical centres etc to have high physical standards. As a church we cannot offer 1950's or 1850's standards of comfort and accessibility.



10. The Church building has to be seen and used in the context of the Church Centre, the Rectory, the church car-park, the Scout Hall (owned by the Church) and other community facilities, including churches in Weston and to a lesser extent Newbridge.

11. Maintaining a large building which is open – on average – for only eight hours per week and for occasional other services and events is almost certainly not good stewardship.

OUR ASPIRATIONS AND VISION

12. Bearing in mind the starting points listed above, we believe that the All Saints Weston Church building of today and tomorrow should be one which:

- a.** Speaks of continuity and permanence in a fast changing world but which also shows itself capable of adapting in response to the way people live their lives today; the needs of people today; the way in which people learn today; and some of the aesthetics of today. It should be both traditional and contemporary.
- b.** Lifts people's spirits when they come into it and enhances our capacity and need for worship, reflection and being open to the Spirit of God.
- c.** Is full of light and life – not the opposites.
- d.** Is flexible and adaptable for different forms of worship and gathering together; for different sizes of groups as well as other activities.
- e.** Is free from clutter and a dumping ground for odds and ends.
- f.** Conveys a sense of transcendence or specialness without being seen as a museum piece or National Trust house.



g. Has a sense of invitation and welcome, rather than any sense of exclusivity and barriers.

h. Promotes fellowship, community, belonging.

i. Is a place that people want to come to.

j. Is well-signposted and 'connected' to the Church Centre and to the High Street and sits well in its setting.

SPECIFIC AREAS OF FOCUS

13. Some things will change, although as yet no scheme has been drawn up, no architects appointed and no actual decisions have been made. But in any brief that is given to an architect, we are likely to invite proposals and options for the following:

a. Improved lighting

b. Better and more adaptable seating arrangements

c. Flooring

d. Improved sound system

e. The visual appearance and colour of the interior spaces

f. Improved physical access and entrances to the building

g. Improved toilet facilities

h. Improved refreshment facilities

i. Making better use of the balcony space

j. Improved storage facilities

k. Renovating, replacing or moving the organ

l. Altering the position of some of the memorial tablets (but not dispensing with them)

m. Improving the area around the current vestry, toilets and north (disabled access) entry

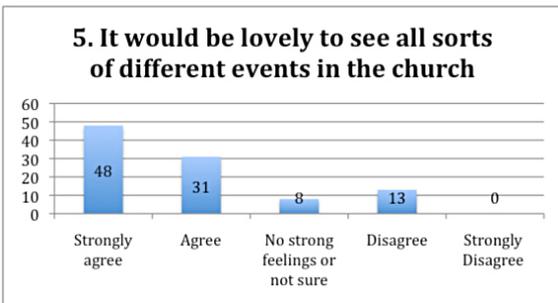
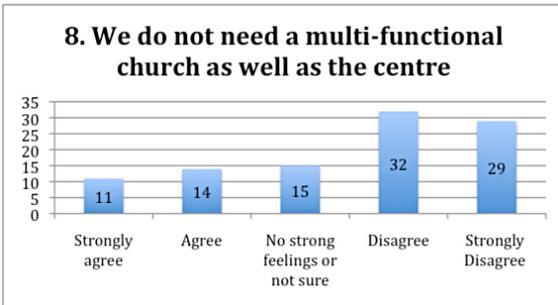
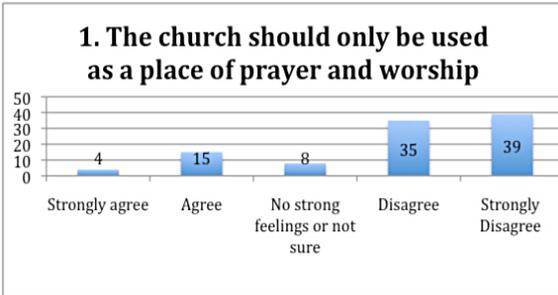
n. Reviewing the best place for a main entry into the church

o. Improving the areas around the church, ie churchyard and the connections

Church Survey 1: Testing the waters

141 responses - 31/07/13

Section 1: MULTI OR SINGLE USE?



REPRESENTATIVE COMMENTS FROM THE CHURCH SURVEY

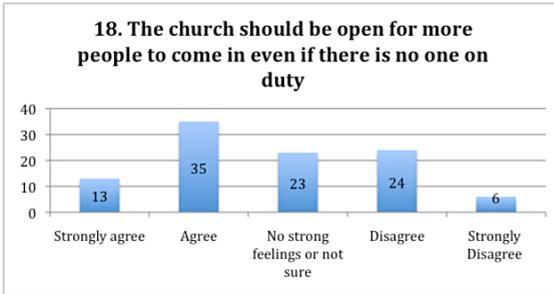
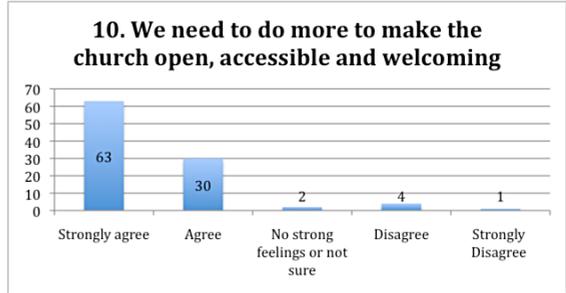
I feel that if we are to continue to use the church as a place of worship and also for other activities, it must be made as functional and practical as possible.

The church is a beautiful building and, apart from being a place of worship and prayer, it is an integral part of the community of Weston. Events such as hosting the viewing of the Olympic opening ceremony in the church last summer brought together members of the community who

perhaps wouldn't ordinarily go into the building. The church centre is such a blessing and a great multifunctional facility but that doesn't mean that aiming to use the church building itself for other purposes should be ruled out. The main features of the structure and interior should definitely be kept but changing the seating so that it is more comfortable and more flexible would be a massive advantage.

Section 2: OPEN THE BOX?

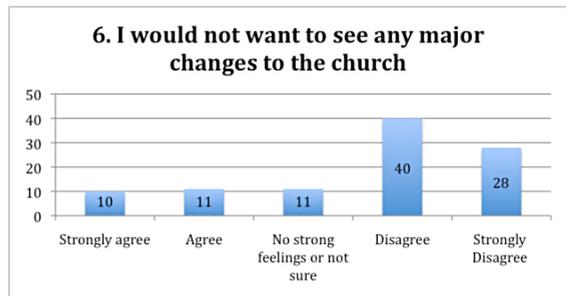
Creating an openness of space and accessibility is key to welcome non-churchy people into the church.



I would like to see the church as an accessible open building that fits today's culture and that people want to come to and can identify the church with the world.

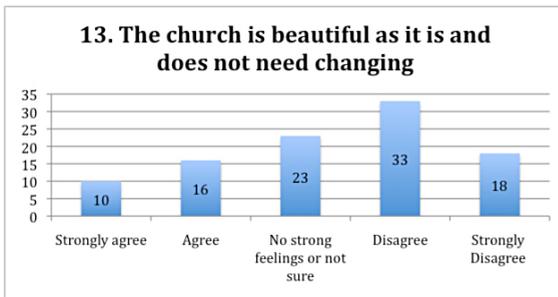
Section 3: RADICALS OR CONSERVATIVES?

We want new people to walk in (to church or centre) and say "gosh, this isn't at all what I expected...."



I was brought up CofE and have always worshipped in stone, traditional churches. It feels right to worship there and I don't feel as comfortable when going to church in school halls etc, as I don't feel God there.

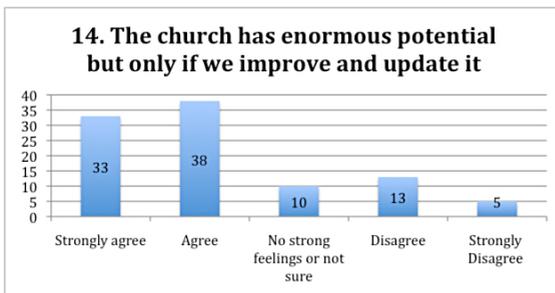
I think the "unchurched" expect old church buildings to look a certain way & that modernising the interior would not make much difference to them & might be counterproductive, i.e. the fuss over the Rood Screen Removal. The Church Centre is an alternative venue as a modern, functional attractive space.



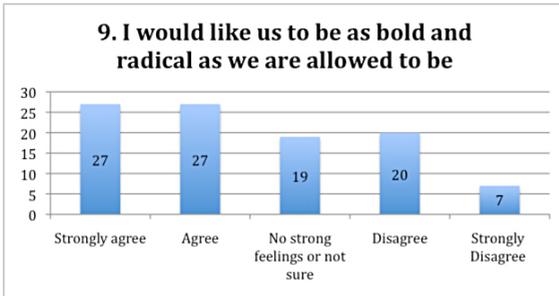
I think there is a lot to be said for having a traditional church. It's what people expect

We need to remember that we have the centre as well - we can restrict the activities in Church to those that are most suitable; e.g. I can't see the point of putting a proper kitchen in church. It is good to remember that this is "The House of God" and not to have anything that might be considered disrespectful going.

The New Testament Church is 'ecclesia' = 'called out ones'. The church is therefore people not a building. The principle should be that the building must serve the present and planned needs of the people, whilst being sensitive to an historic building where people have worshipped for hundreds of years.



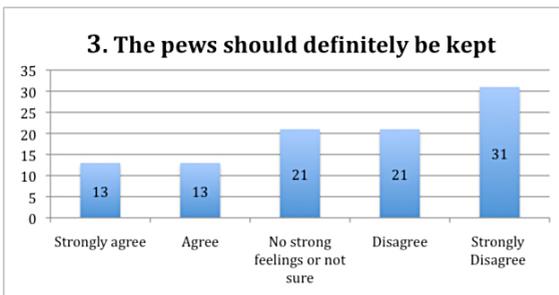
It's not, in my opinion, about being radical (or not) - it should be about making the best use of the spaces we have - we have a church centre so there's no need for tables and chairs in church to have "tea parties"!



Plan for the future but maintain a link to the past

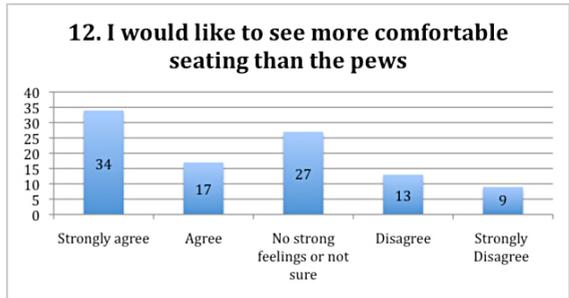
I don't think change is about being bold or radical but about being practical and realistic to enable the church to be used in more diverse ways; ways that helps the current church and that of future generations to engage with God and each other in a comfortable space that has options for worshipping/meeting together in different formats. Although it would be good to make the congregation more comfortable by removing the pews, for me it's not all about comfort but about enabling the space to be used diversely as well. I wouldn't necessarily want to see them all removed either but there must be a compromise between history and making the space more usable?

Section 4: TO PEW OR NOT TO PEW?

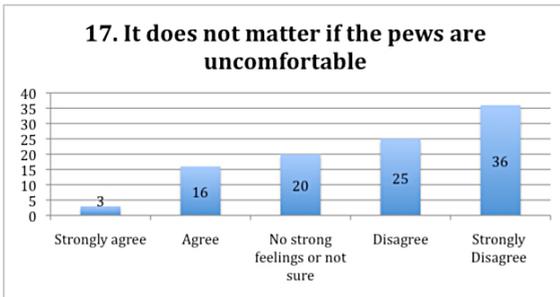


Pews are attractive and give character to the church; cushions can be provided to make them more comfortable. If there is a problem, fix it but do not spend unnecessary money on aesthetics.

I believe that the character of the church should be maintained to reflect the history and traditions of the Christian journey. Comfortable chairs will not make our mission work easier.



I'm concerned the church would hold fewer people with chairs rather than pews.

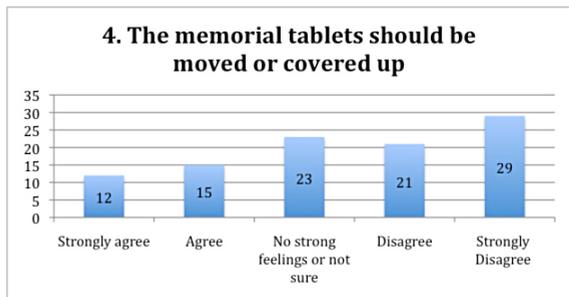


I think that the comfort of people attending church is a valid point but the most important

focus for looking at making changes to the buildings should surely be to make them as accessible as possible for non-churchgoers. This extends beyond the fabric of the building though and involves putting money and effort into reaching those people in Weston who don't currently know God or attend church.

Section 5: KEEP TAKING THE TABLETS?

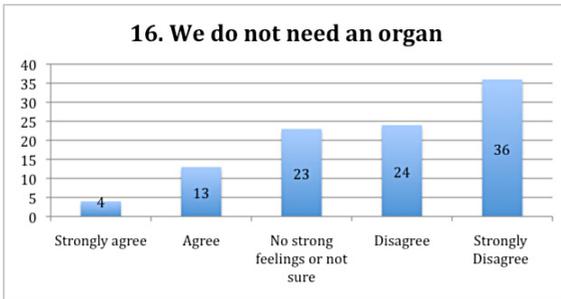
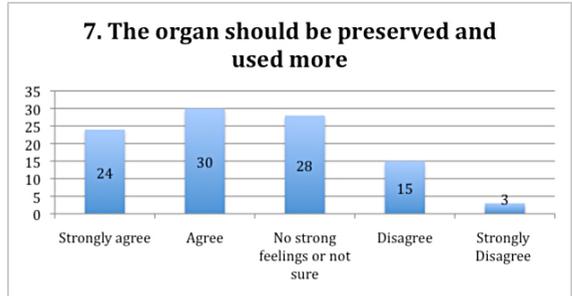
I think we're privileged to have inherited a beautiful building and it is right for us to protect and preserve it. And those who are doing that are doing a wonderful service



for God. But I do think God has greater ambitions for us his people, the church, and for our hearts and our community than he has for our bricks and mortar.

Section 6: ORGAN DONATION?

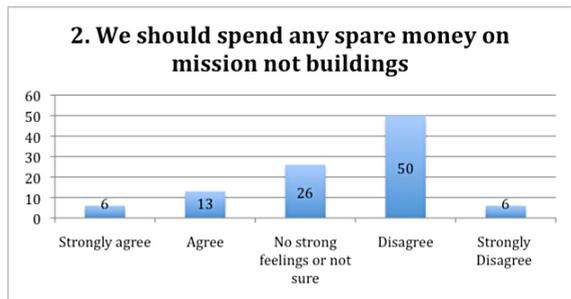
Be bold -- but sensitive. Somehow aim for a balance of retaining what is good and relevant of the old, and removing anything which is unhelpful or a barrier to engaging with the local community in the present day and looking for the future.



It would be great to improve the interior of the building in a way that makes the space more diverse for its users. I think it is important that this is done sensitively to the history of the building.

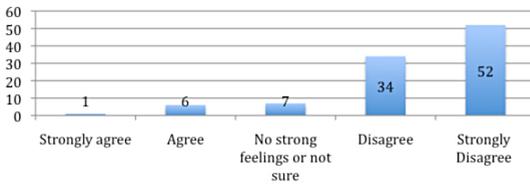
Section 7: QUICK, CHEAP AND DIRTY OR SOMETHING MORE?

Funding. There is never 'a better time' to ask people to give. Faith will drive the project.



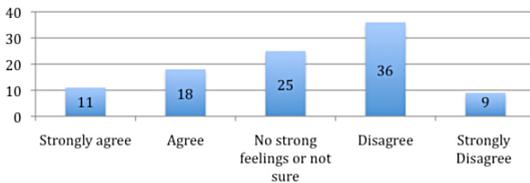
Be Bold, Be Adventurous, Expect Criticism. Did Jesus Establish buildings with set features or did he look at what the people of his day needed?

11. The church building is very expensive and is no longer appropriate, desirable or necessary

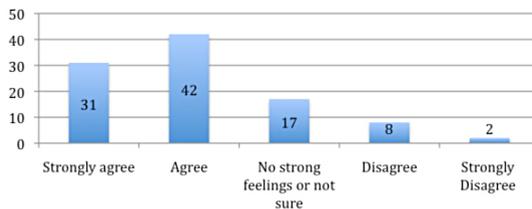


Major spending on the church in the current economic climate will send out an inappropriate message to the community of Weston. Also there have been financial needs within the church for a number of years that have not been met due to the lack of funds. These are currently more important.

15. It would not be right with all the needs around us to spend a lot of money on buildings

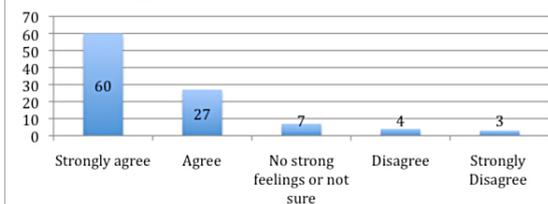


19. We should spend money on improving the church as we do on our homes



Homes come in all shapes, sizes and ages, and so do churches. We have the church we have inherited and I cannot see much point in trying to make it what it isn't. Whatever we do on the inside, it is likely to look pretty much the same outside. I came to this church, unfamiliar with CoFE buildings and I was immediately drawn by the warmth, comfort and lightness of the interior. Our predecessors did a good job in lightening the walls from the old stone, in laying a carpet and refitting the welcome area at the back.

20. We need to think in terms of the next 25 years, not two or three years



Preserve the history of our buildings in acknowledgement of where we, as a church community, have come from and the ways that the people of Weston have worshipped here in the past... but remember the church of the present and future in the decision making process. Consider changes that may enable us to be more diverse in our worship and fellowship together and help us be more accessible to those outside the church in the wider community to draw them in.

This is crucial to our mission. The church is our living history. Today's enquiring incomers will look in and see, and decide. If they see something living, preserving and yet accessible, well-kept then that is a witness. They will then come to see that 'church' is people and not buildings.

WHAT NEXT?

As we said at the beginning of this report, this is only the start. We hope that this and the services on September 29th have got you thinking some more and maybe even excited about where we might be going.

For those of you who attend a home group there will be an opportunity to spend an hour or two giving this some more thought and we will ask home group leaders to give us some feedback.

If you are not in a home group, or even if you are and you want to make sure your own thoughts and ideas are received, then you can speak to or email any one of the Reimagining Our Buildings Team

Tom Peryer

Rachael Stone

Geoff Evans

Sandy Hewit

Gary Oaten

John Colvin

Simon Brand

Annie Robb

Patrick Whitworth

We will get all of the comments that we received in the first survey up on the website.

Over the next 2-3 months the Team aims to draw up a BRIEF for an architect. This will tell the architect something about our vision and something about the way our church currently works and how we think it might work in the future. We will ask them to look creatively at the building and to come up with a series of ideas and options for us to consider.

As we are working on that Brief, we will also be thinking about who might be the best architect for us. That means doing some research and then going through a competitive interview process. We think that might happen sometime in early 2014.

We will keep you informed about both developments and of course the PCC will be overseeing the process.