



RECRUITMENT OF NEXT VICAR OF BERWICK

ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

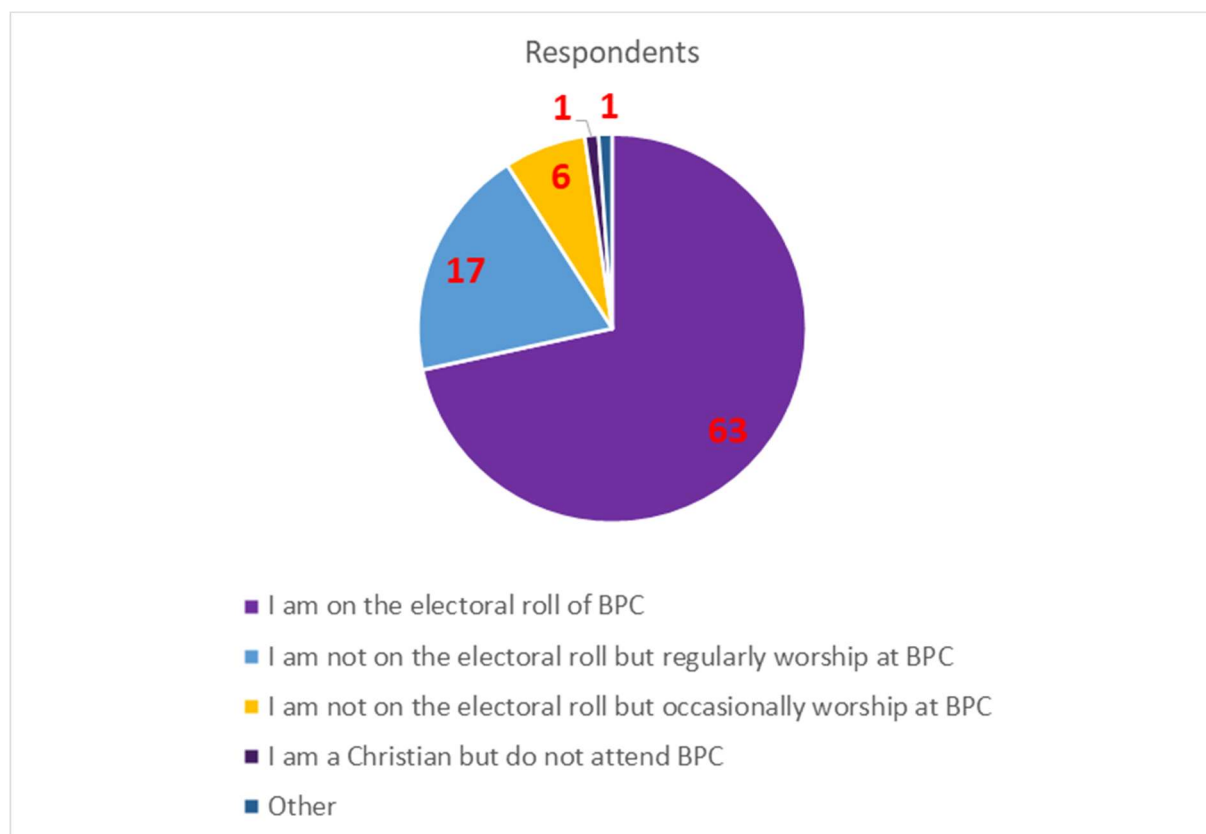
OCTOBER 2023

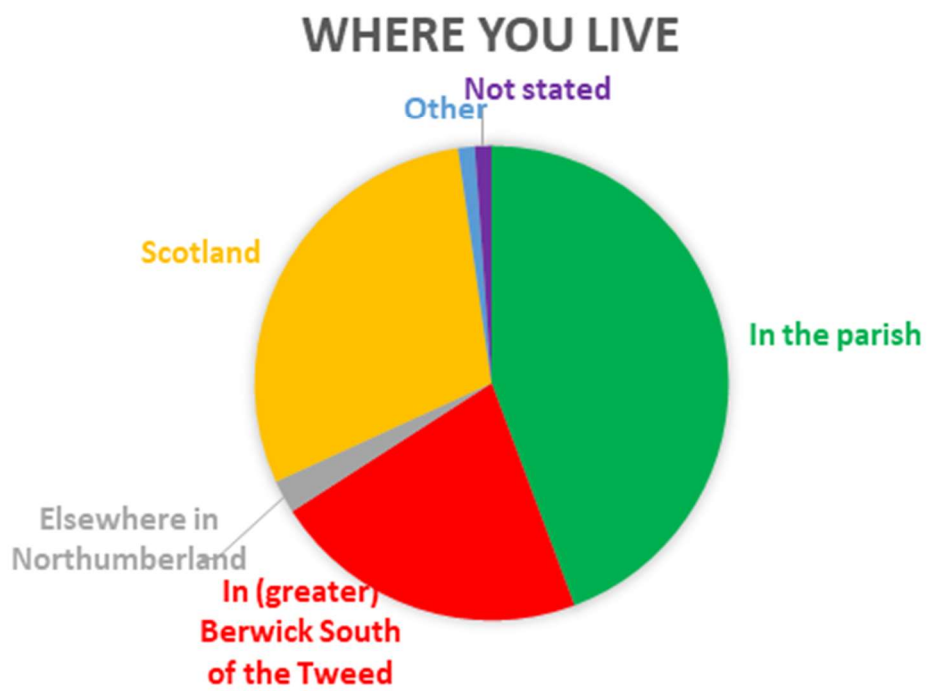
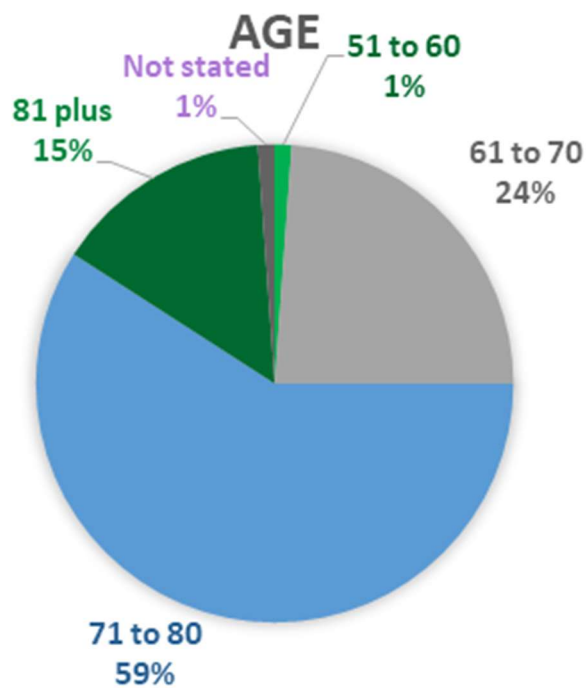
Questionnaire to parishioners

The recruitment of a new vicar for Berwick Parish Church requires the production of a Parish Brochure to provide potential candidates with the information they need to inform their decision as to whether to apply. Much of this brochure consists of factual information about the town and church, but a key element is to set out the priorities of the PCC and the key characteristics sought in the new vicar. The PCC plans an away day on 7 October to consider these questions, and in order to inform their discussions, commissioned a survey of parishioners by means of a questionnaire, and this summary sets out the results of this survey.

All members of the congregation were invited, by email, post or by announcements in church, to complete the questionnaire and both online and paper versions made available. Those that were submitted on paper were keyed in by volunteers in order to form a complete set of results. Further details of the analysis process are described in the Appendix.

There were 88 submissions in total. The following charts show the breakdown of the respondents by various characteristics.

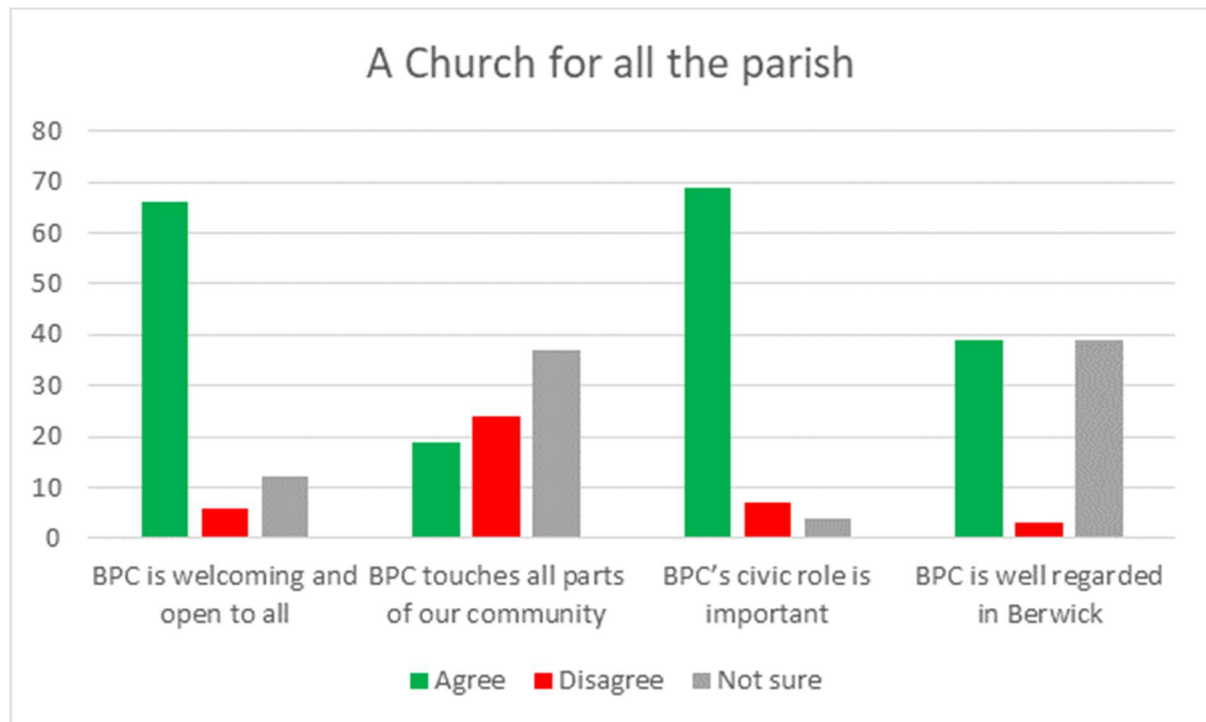




PART A

Part A asked various questions about Berwick Parish Church. In each section, there were statements with which the respondent was asked to agree or disagree, or state they were not sure, following which there was a space for comments. The responses in each section are shown as a chart, followed by a summary of comments.

Q3-7 A church for all the parish



What more might BPC do to show that it is a church for all in the parish?

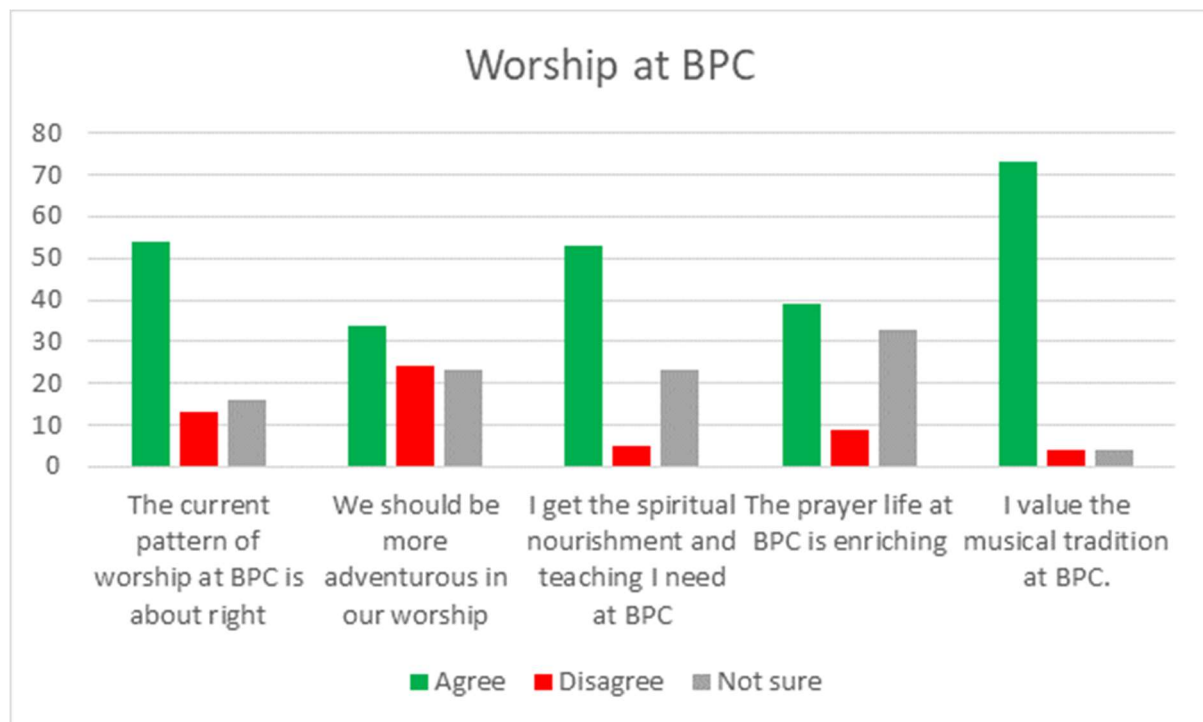
Responses to this question focused on ideas for reaching out to children and young people, and also to those in the North of the parish who have little contact with the church. The current forms of worship are seen as difficult to access by those under 60 who have not been brought up to attend regular worship. (More detail of views on this subject will be found in responses to the next question.)

Several respondents contributed practical suggestions such as employing a youth worker, or holding events aimed more at specific groups (eg mothers & children) in locations in the North of town, perhaps associated with one of the church schools. (See also responses to Q19-22). Other suggestions were to hold more services for the uniformed groups and community groups within the town, or to find a way of having a presence in the High Street, such as a Christian shop or café.

Publicity is also seen as an area that could be improved, to create more awareness of the church and its facilities, and offset the perceived disadvantage of our edge of town centre location, overshadowed by our Church of Scotland neighbour.

Although the overwhelming response to Q3 indicated that BPC is seen as welcoming, a few respondents felt that we could improve our welcome of newcomers to the church by a more organised approach to newcomers who choose to attend worship, or whom we come into contact with as a result of other events (eg baptisms, weddings).

Q8-13 Worship at BPC



What changes would you like to see to worship at BPC, if any?

Although there was strong support for the current pattern of services, when asked whether there should be changes, the views were more divided. There were several responses indicating reluctance for any form of change, but a larger number were in favour of some changes to the current pattern of services.

The change attracting the most comment reflected a need felt by many to make some provision for family services. There were a few suggestions as to how this might be done: some suggested holding a family service in place of Parish Eucharist once a month, and another suggestion was to have a separate family service following the 10.00 Parish Eucharist (presumably this would require some adjustments to timings but this was not explored in responses), or on Sunday afternoon. Even amongst those who disagreed that we should be more adventurous in worship, there were several who supported some form of provision for a family service.

Another area that attracted a sizeable number of requests for change was for more joyful hymns – many of those in the current hymn book were felt to be slow and dull.

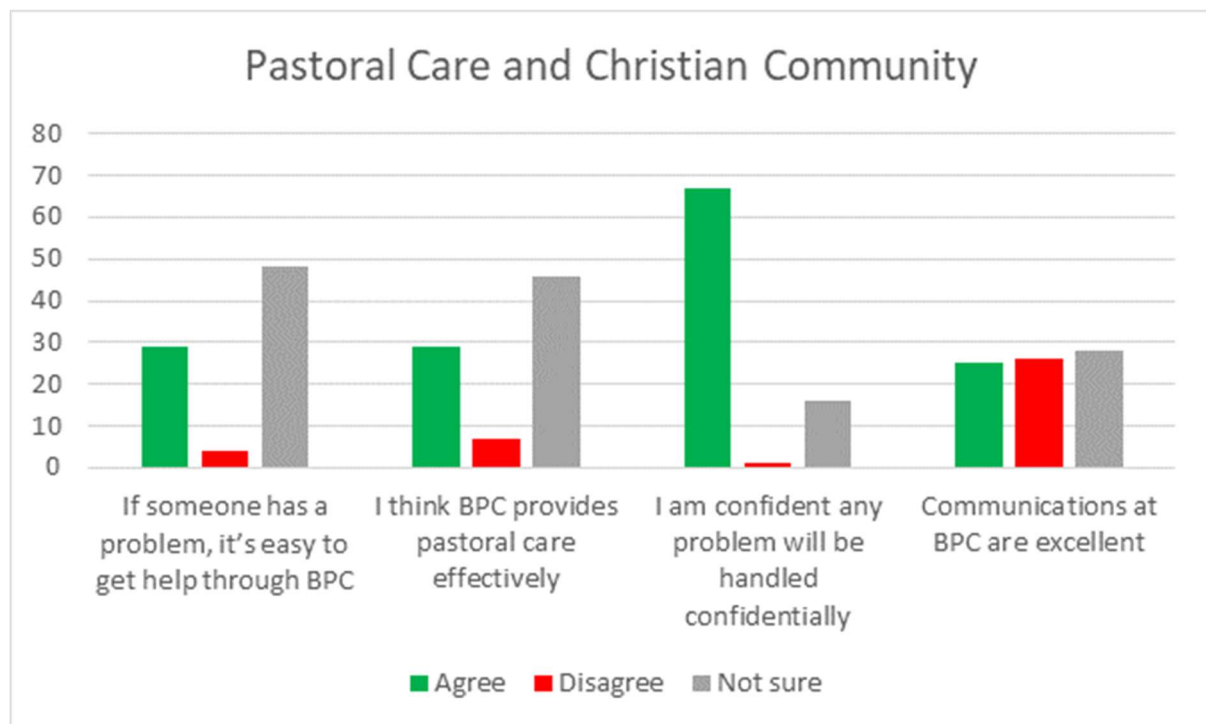
There were a few comments on the use of the Book of Common Prayer – mostly emphasising the need to retain it, but a few indicating that its use should be reduced.

The music in church – particular under the care of our new Director of Music – came in for much positive comment, but the need to retain the traditional evensong settings (allowing for congregational involvement), at least for most services, was emphasised by some respondents.

Other suggestions made include

- Sermons more relevant to the issues of modern life
- Regular healing services
- Home study groups.

Q14-18 Pastoral care and Christian community



What improvements in pastoral care or communication at BPC would you like to see, if any?

Comments in this section generally focused on pastoral care and on communications.

Regarding **pastoral care**, whilst the need for confidentiality in dealing with individual cases

was acknowledged, many indicated ignorance of what care is provided or of how to access it if needed. Accordingly, a number said they felt unqualified to comment in any detail.

The care provided by the clergy was acknowledged and appreciated but there were also some references to the potential role of lay members of the congregation in working with the clergy to help meet needs. Some comments noted that pastoral care is not just about visits to those with problems but should embrace in principle the whole church community, and doing this effectively needs communication and organisation among those involved. A few referred nostalgically to the Pastoral Group which had fulfilled this role in the past but of the state of which post-Covid they seemed unaware.

The few who felt informed enough to comment on how well current arrangements operate felt satisfied that cases are handled sensitively and that confidentiality is observed but overall the desire was for “more clarity in pastoral care arrangements and options for support”. Among specific suggestions made were better recognition of people with disabilities and special needs, and the possible introduction of a ‘buddy’ scheme.

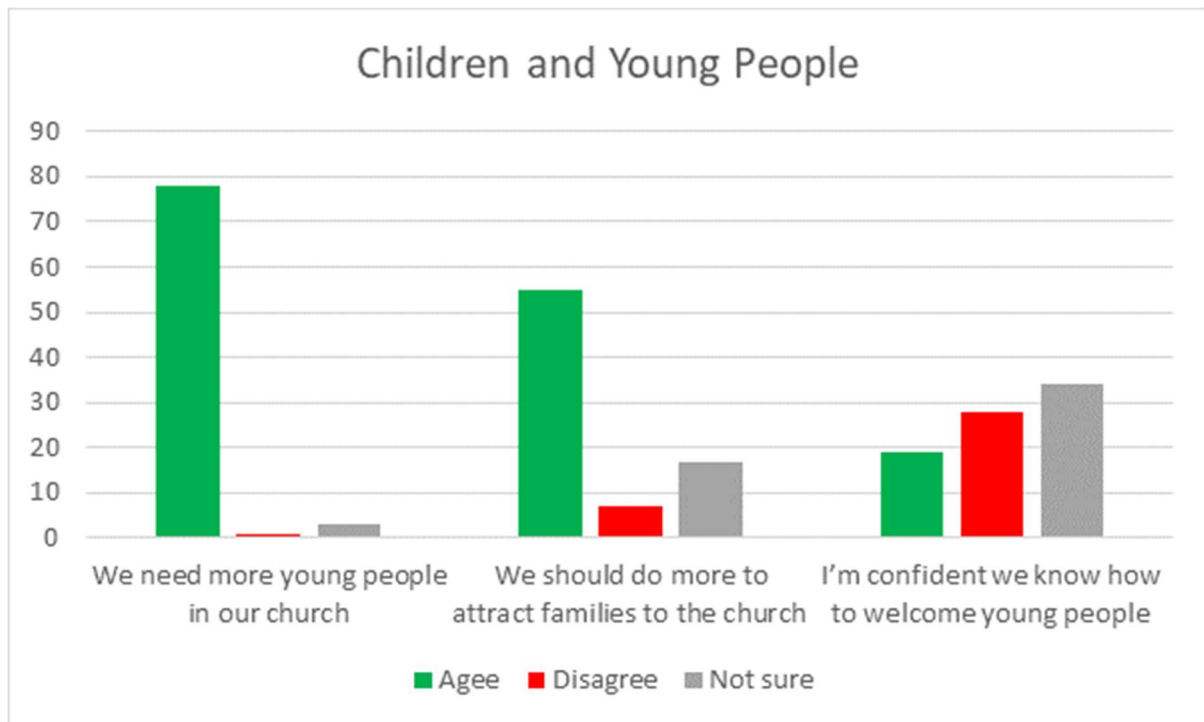
By contrast, there were many more specific suggestions in relation to **communications**, which were generally acknowledged to be ‘a work in progress’, i.e. improving – “better,” one person commented, “now we have accepted we have to have a hybrid system (digital and paper)” - but still with some way to go. The need for better coordinated channels of communication and further improvement in/more frequent updating of the website were also mentioned, along with a request for PCC minutes to be published (as they previously had been).

Other suggestions made by more than one person included:

- Merging the Monthly Messenger and the weekly pew sheet, producing a fuller weekly leaflet covering both immediate and longer term matters.
- Better access to/positioning of noticeboards.
- Wider advertising of events.

On building Christian community, two respondents proposed less formal seating arrangements for coffee after a service: “having tables tends to encourage us to sit with people we know already – too difficult for newcomers to break in”.

Q19-22 Children and Young People



What more should we be doing to attract young people to BPC?

There is unanimous agreement that building connections with young people and engaging them in church life is our responsibility as disciples; there is also a strong sense that engaging with children and attracting young people cannot be separated from our work with families.

Many responses and comments carried a belief that *“it’s not going to be easy: it’s a hard call for the congregation”*.

Some expressed the view that there may not be a strong motivation to make changes, noting the demographic of the congregation and the wide generational difference, a lack of understanding of children today, together with a wish to maintain current traditions and practices in BPC.

Many challenges, obstacles and barriers were noted, particularly in the following areas:

- The formality of our worship is not suitable and may be off putting for young people. *“The physical environment and form of worship can be seen as barriers to the welcoming of young people”*.
- The 10am parish eucharist is not welcoming for families and young people: children are expected to stay quiet and there are few opportunities for young people to get involved.
- The apparent disconnect between strong and valued connections which the clergy and lay people have with the church schools (weekly assemblies, RE teaching, etc.), but these have not led to a connection with families through attendance at regular church services. Further, when the children move to Middle School, connections are lost.

Note: there was some optimism that moving to a 2-tier system will provide more and longer opportunity to connect with the children

- Sunday is family time: attending a church service is not thought of as family time.

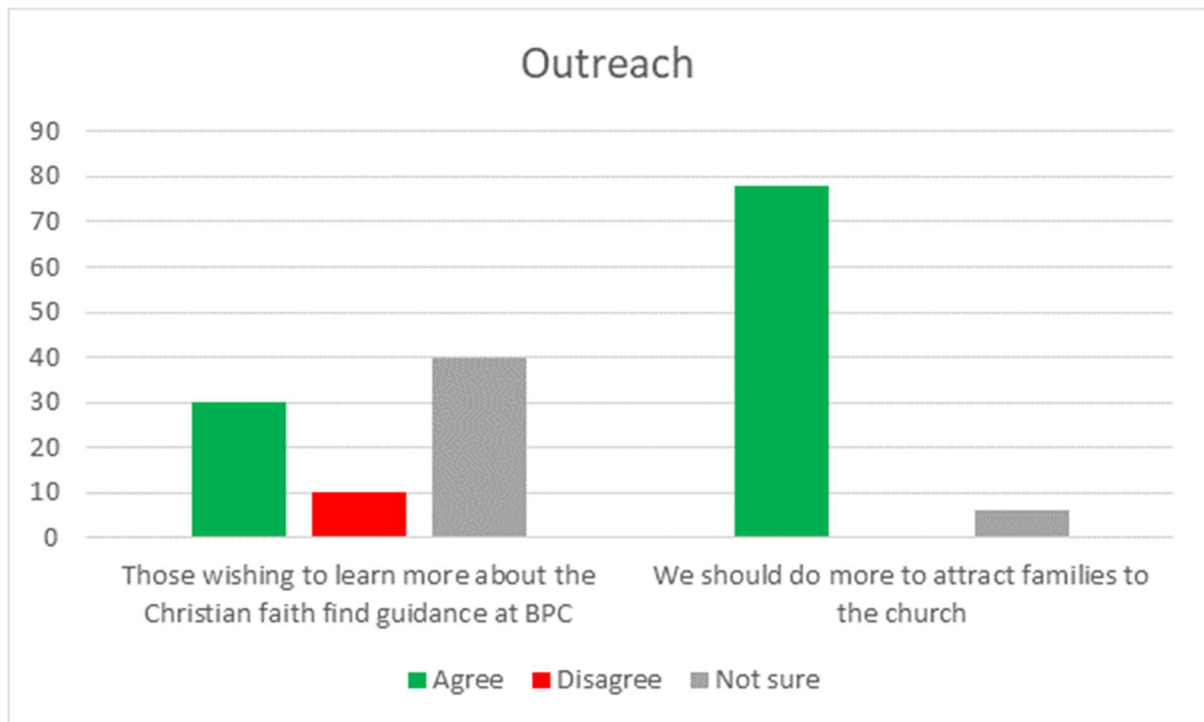
Despite the barriers and obstacles noted, many practical ideas for attracting and engaging children and young people were suggested. They include:

- Hiring a young vicar who can relate to young people, hiring a Youth Worker
- organising family friendly, accessible worship in church and in locations/on days that work for families (eg a Pram service), making use of facilities in different locations: eg the Community House at St. Mary's school
- increased involvement of young people in the 10am service: eg prayers and readings
- conducting baptisms during the 10am service
- further build attendance at Sparklers through school connections and find ways to connect with young Mums, eg a Pram service
- organising more 'special' services: eg a service for families & godparents of babies baptised during the year.
- organising activities and events specifically targeted at young people: examples given included a Junior Choir; a music group (in cooperation with schools); 'fun' events; mini-pilgrimages; age-appropriate spiritual courses
- increasing engagement with youth groups: eg the cadets. Tom's work with the Youth Project is appreciated: this needs to carry on
- advertise events & activities with technology that young people use.

The responses and comments suggested that most people are thinking about attracting young people and families to the church by 'enhancing' what we are already doing, perhaps re-introducing what has been done before. A few respondents offer thoughts for a broader perspective. Examples include:

- *“(we need) to understand the cultural shifts in how children are positioned in society so that our approach is less didactic and their role less passive.....we need to find ways to build relationships which enable young people to safely express the questions and issues they bring in relation to spirituality and faith”*
- *“if we wish to attract new people of any age, we must welcome them on their terms, not ours. In other words, the newcomer is the most important.”*

Q23-25 Outreach



Have you any suggestions on how to encourage families into BPC?

Q25: Have you any suggestions on how to encourage families into BPC?

Encouraging families into BPC appears to be a priority for most respondents. Some, however, reflected a sense of perplexity about how we might approach this, as illustrated by one respondent: *'this is hard. I'm not convinced the obvious things (Messy church etc) work, but neither does a solid phalanx of greying people (like me)'*. It was also recognised that many families experience competing demands on their time which can be a barrier to engagement with church.

Despite this, suggestions were offered which ranged from adaptations to existing patterns of worship and providing family friendly activities within the church, to developing our mission outside the boundaries of the church building.

Suggested adaptations to make our services more family friendly included:

- Considering service times that suit families -including an early evening service on Friday or Saturdays.
- Adapting the style of services to include more modern hymns/music, occasional informal special services such as pet or pram services, or messy church.
- Encouraging children/ young people's participation in services particularly, although not exclusively through the choir. Providing bursaries to those joining the choir was suggested. Youth orchestra, a drama group, and regular Sunday school were suggested as ways of encouraging participation.

- Making families feel more welcome (as some may feel intimidated when ‘*faced with books and sheets of paper, a choice of seating and people who look like they know all the ropes!*’)
- Making the layout of the church building/s more user friendly and enabling space for children’s activities.
- More actively following up baptism or bereaved families and extending our welcome to families through invitation (including invitation Sundays for those invited by members of the congregation).

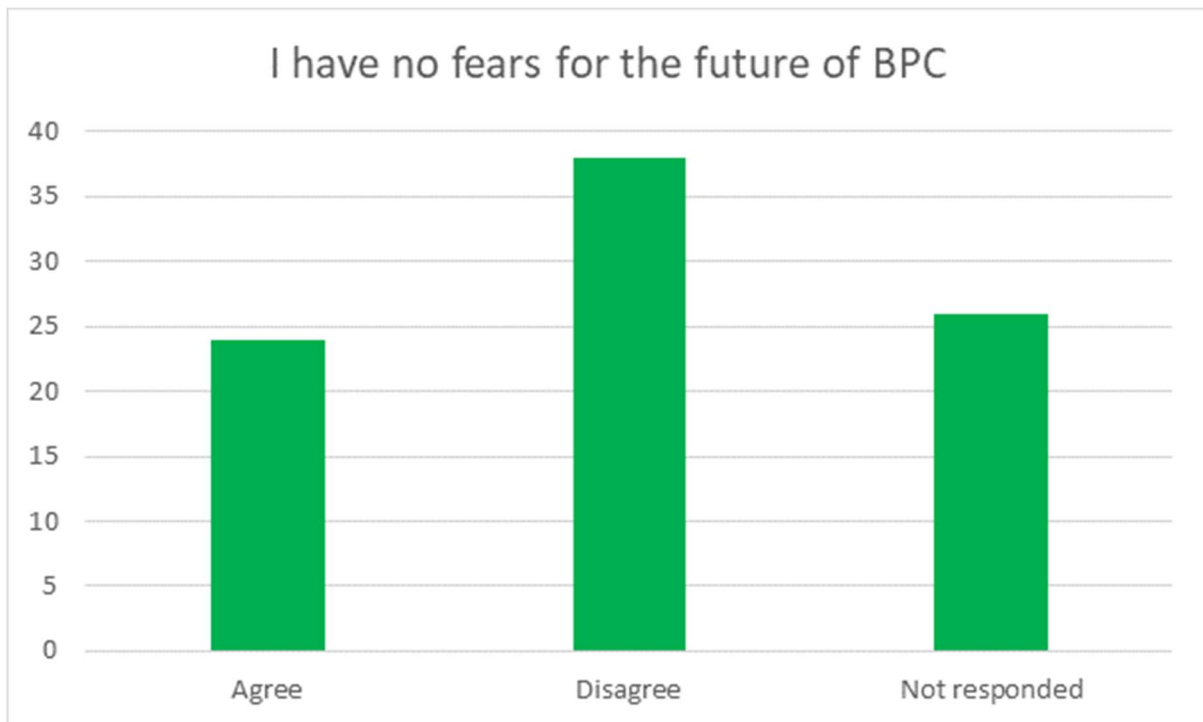
Some respondents emphasised these would require the commitment of the congregation to attend additional services, volunteer for messy church events or be willing to consider adaptations to patterns of worship they cherish.

Several respondents suggested that the church currently lacks a space to engage with those seeking to understand the Christian faith. Alpha was mentioned by some and working collaboratively with other churches was also mentioned to open space for exploration of spirituality and faith.

Many respondents suggested family friendly social events such as dad and son events, walks, visits to places of interest, handicraft afternoons, baby and parent music sessions or children’s activity days to attract families into the church. Some highlighted the need to consider family of all ages (including ‘*empty nesters*’). Although these could be a way to build relationships with families in our community, for some this requires us to move beyond the church building/s and into the community. Many respondents considered the potential our link with the schools has in widening our contact with families outside the confines of the church building. The re-organisation of schooling in the town may offer further opportunities to build upon the links already made with schools. Although there was enthusiasm for developing our contact with the schools there was also a sense that some would value some more information about existing links with the church schools and whether the links with Holy Trinity were as developed as those with St Mary’s.

Some respondents drew attention to the need for us to be clear about what families within our local community need. Suggestions were made to ask for the views of families of baptised infants, or those whose children attend church schools. The key message from these responses is that we cannot assume to know but need to build relationships that enable us to engage with them and to be open to their perspectives. This is likely to require us to be willing to make changes.

Q25-26 I have no fears for the future of BPC



The majority response was that the church is full of the elderly people, with a few young ones to continue Christ's teachings. As one comment made "this is evident by the number of blister packs collected".

All was not negative with comments about attracting the young and bringing young families to church, with suggestions regarding mother and baby groups and a youth club. Another suggestion was to attract young people into the choir with singing of new and modern hymns.

There were several suggestions to change the inside of the building so it becomes multifunctional for many activities both religious and secular, such as removal of the pews. The other point of view expressed was to keep the present lay out as it is now.

Other individual comments of interest include:

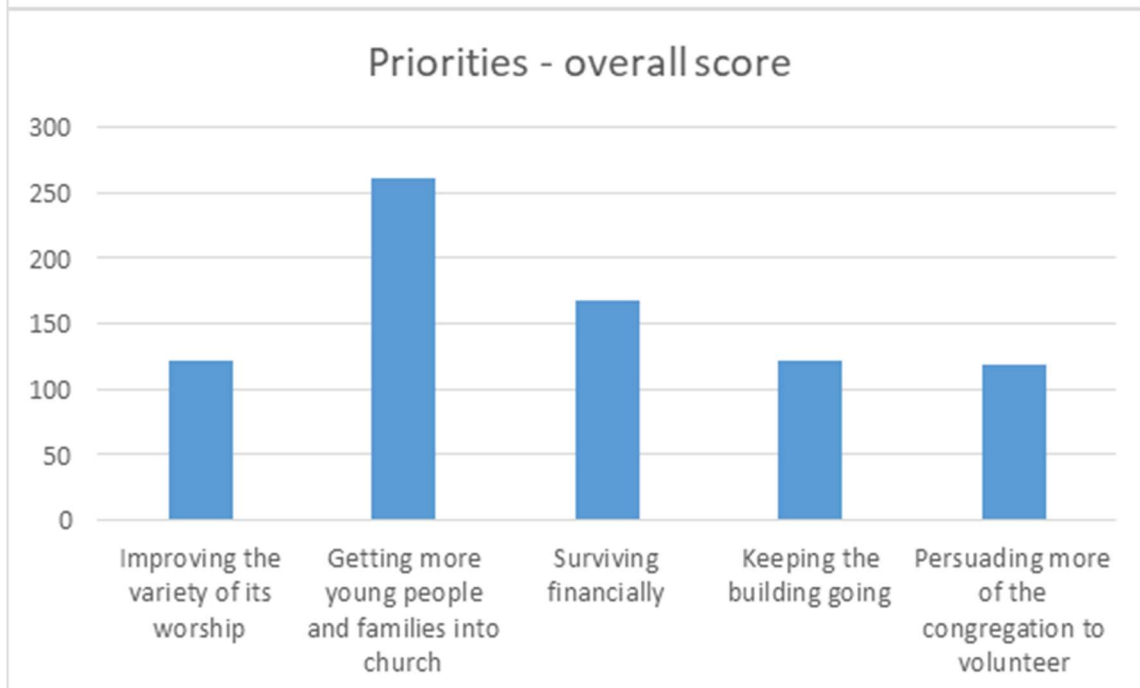
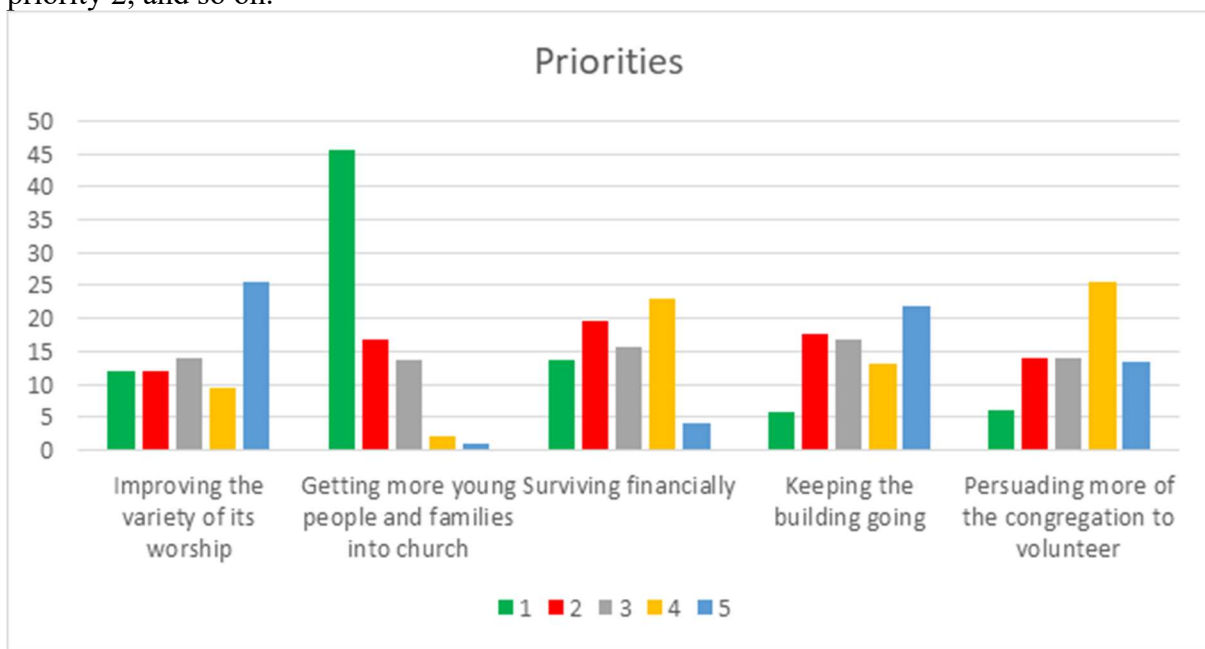
- Most of the Christian churches throughout the country are dying except for the evangelical ones who proclaim the Gospel.
- Most of the clergy are retired and elderly in our congregation. Lack of training for the laity to lead or assist with services, and other activities to ease the pressure on the vicar.
- The need to attract more young people is a recurring comment, but how?
- Community and Civic services attract people into the church and can be uplifting and bringing unfamiliar people into the church.
- The Church nationally needs to rebuild trust and confidence following the challenges/scandals of the past few years.
- A church of over sixties professionals is not a parish church.

- Locals and visitors like the special spiritual atmosphere within the church which should be nurtured.

The most concerning facts seems to be what will happen in twenty years' time. If we do not attract young people to be active in the church, what is to happen to Jesus' teachings in the town?

Q27 Priorities

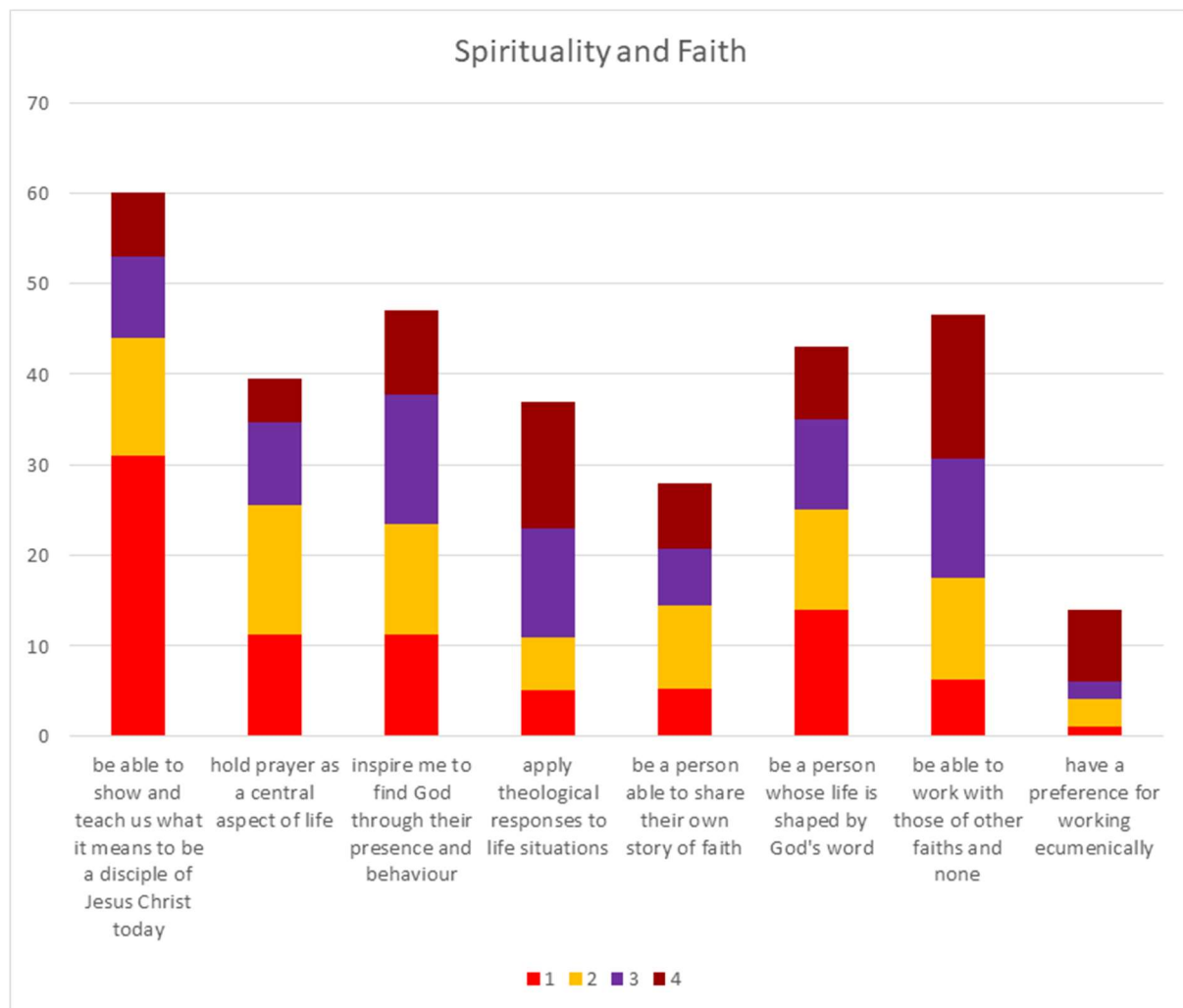
Respondents were asked to place five statements in order of priority. The first chart below shows the details of the responses (priority 1 selections in green, priority 2 in red, and so on), and the second chart amalgamates these by assigning 4 points to priority 1 selections, 3 to priority 2, and so on.



Part B: About our Next Vicar

In this section, respondents were asked to select up to four from a set of characteristics and rank them in order of priority, followed by any comments. In the charts that follow, the red portion of the bar represents the priority 1 choices, the yellow priority 2, and so on. The total height of the bar shows the number who selected this as one of their four characteristics.

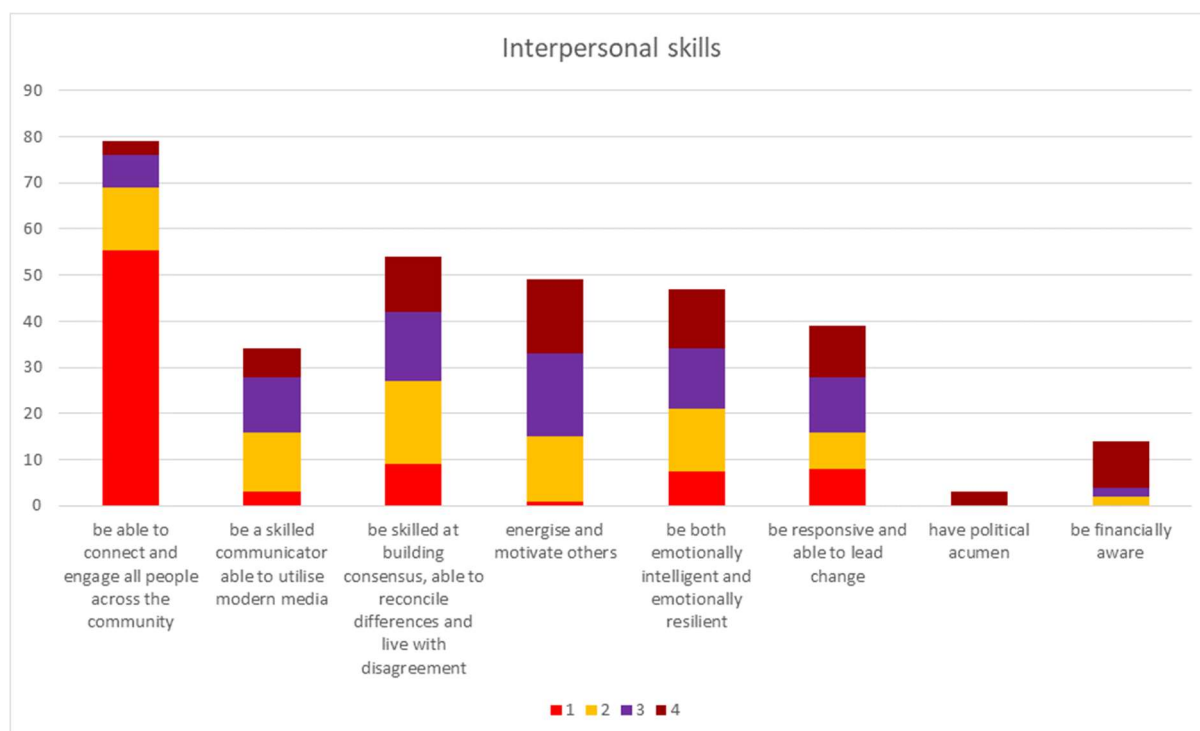
Q28 Spirituality and faith



Several respondents found it difficult to prioritise as they felt all were desirable, even critical. The majority of responses focused on the need for our new Vicar to be able to lead us and teach us the meaning of being a disciple of Christ in the modern world. Finding God through their presence and behaviour is very important as well as being inspirational eg leading by example and sharing their own Faith based experiences.

Also seen as important was the ability to respond to life situations theologically in these uncertain times through experience outside the Church. Being a good communicator at all levels with a down to earth approach and spiritually uplifting services all featured. Our retired Vicar was held to be a good example of what we need.

Q29 People skills



Although some respondents commented that all the skills listed under this heading were important and that consequently they found it difficult to choose between them, most were clear that neither political acumen nor financial awareness were anywhere near the top of their list. A few saw the options listed as quite secular, emphasising that Berwick Parish Church is seeking a spiritual leader, not a secular manager.

That said, there was broad agreement about the interpersonal skills which that leader will need to possess:

- The ability to listen and understand, as well as to be a good communicator (social media skills being thought far less important than those involved in dealing directly with people).
- A genuine concern for, and ability to connect with people right across the community of Berwick.

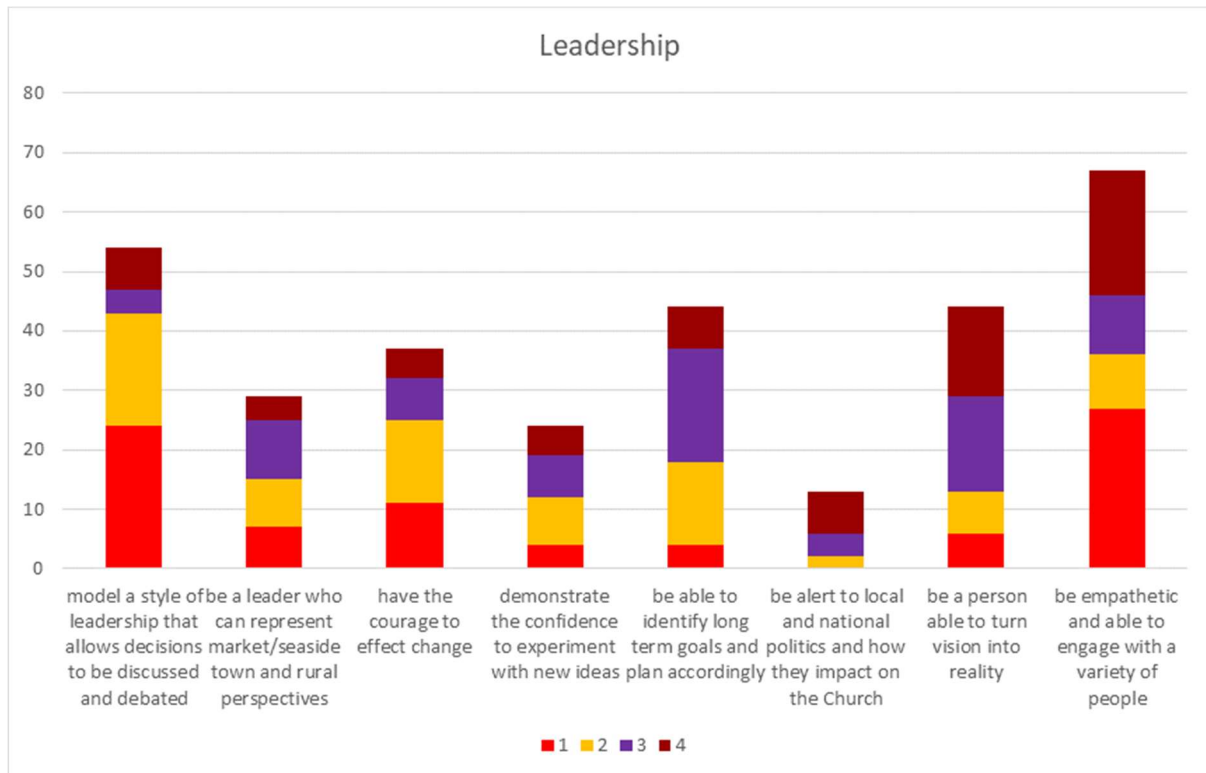
Open, rounded and grounded, “an icon of Christ in the community”, were among the words and phrases used.

As a leader, comments emphasised the need for those personal skills which will help build the consensus to foster change where that is needed. These include the ability not only to discern where change is desirable but to build a team and to draw on the skills of others in the team, not just on their own skills, to effect that change.

Several respondents stressed the inner qualities any Vicar of Berwick will need to survive in their demanding role, including resilience and the ability to be strong in in both the good and the bad days. Having “courage to lead change in the face of resistance” was stressed by some.

Flexibility, coupled with energy, imagination and, perhaps most important of all, a sense of humour rounded off the list.

Q30 Leadership



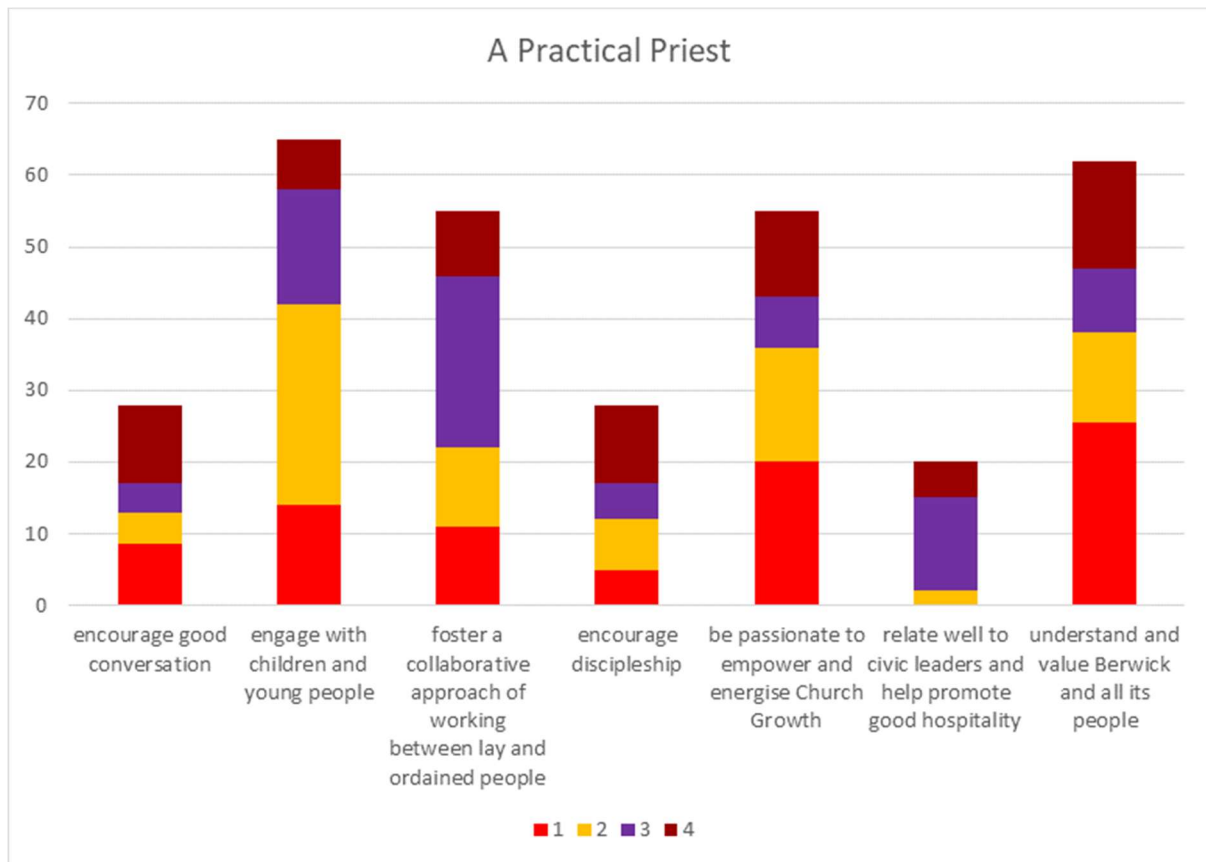
Again, there were several responses expressing the view that all these characteristics are important.

The style of leadership was the subject most commented on. There was considerable emphasis on the need for someone approachable with good listening skills, while at the same time being able to effect change. One comment perhaps captures the gist of what several respondents were trying to express: *Whilst we need a collaborative leadership style we also need someone who, once a decision to change has been made, has the courage to effect it in a way that can take everyone with them.*

A few respondents questioned the need for change at all, and hence de-emphasised those questions relating to change management, which was indeed seen by a few as reflecting a too secular an approach.

Only one comment was made relating to the need to be alert to local and national politics and their impact on the church, and that was to express a feeling that it was perhaps unnecessary.

Q31 A Practical Priest



Again, respondents found it difficult to prioritise the statements in this section. Although practicality is desirable, it takes many forms, and incumbents will have additional talents incidental to their role (such as Dennis's very valuable skills in unblocking drains!)

The main comments in this area, other than those explaining the difficulty they had in prioritising these characteristics, related to seeking someone who would be both approachable and a strong leader where needed, and above all someone able to relate to the Berwick community.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

As explained in the introduction, questionnaires submitted on paper were keyed in to the online form by volunteers. This led to some issues which were handled as follows:

- a) Some respondents where priorities were requested put more than one item as the same priority, something not possible with the online form. Where this was done, adjustments were made to the data to apportion the score so that the respondent's opinion could be counted. For example, if option A and option B were both seen as priority 1, then this was counted as half a response to option A and half to option B
- b) Some respondents wrote comments on the paper other than in the prescribed boxes – these were placed in the online form in the box most relevant to the comment
- c) Some respondents enclosed letters with their responses – these letters were made available separately to those involved in creating this report

Another issue found with both the online and paper forms was that some respondents, in response to questions of priority, placed the same response with two different priorities. In this case, the highest priority was taken as the correct response, and any other items' priority promoted to fill the gaps. Thus, for example, if a respondent gave options A, B, A, C as the order of priority this would be counted as if the response had been A, B, C.

The data was then assembled in a spreadsheet, and the various graphs in this report produced automatically from this data. Where there were no responses at all in a particular category (for example, anyone under 50 in the age distribution), these categories were omitted.

The boxes requiring textual input were summarised by a team of volunteers. Responses to each question not relevant to the exercise or not legally possible (such as specifying the desired marital status of the new incumbent) were discounted, and the remainder grouped by themes, and then the summary created starting with the theme with most responses.

The whole report thus assembled was then reviewed again by the team of volunteers.

