



Blanchland Abbey Project Resilient Heritage

Evaluation Report
March 2020



BLANCHLAND
ABBAY



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Blanchland Abbey Project Resilient Heritage

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culture ~ evaluation ~ learning

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1. Executive summary

"It's been a fabulous project to be involved in, developing a sense of community spirit, sustainability and commitment." (Volunteer survey response)

The Blanchland Abbey Project has succeeded in encouraging more community involvement with the management and future development of the Abbey, which will provide a more resilient future for the building and strengthen its role within the village.



Abbey Alive! consultation day

The Abbey, listed Grade 1, was originally part of the 12C Premonstratensian Abbey and some of the monastic buildings remain and form the centre of the village (a Scheduled Ancient Monument), making the church and village of national heritage importance as one of the most complete Premonstratensian abbeys in England. It appears that Blanchland is the only village in the UK which is built on the footprint of a medieval abbey.

The Abbey's future was under threat because its congregation is elderly and few in number, and it relied on tourism visitors to bring in additional income in order to be able to maintain the building and pay the Parish Share. The village also has a declining population, decreasing from 135 in 2011 to around 80 in 2019. Blanchland is unusual because most of the properties are owned by the Lord Crewe's Charity and let to tenants. As the older residents have moved into supported accommodation or died, some properties have become additional hotel accommodation. New people have moved into the village, sometimes only on short term lets, so it has often been difficult to encourage them to take part in village life.

Faced with these threats, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and the Blanchland Community Development Organisation (BCDO) identified the need to provide a sustainable future for the church and for the village and its residents and successfully applied for a Resilient Heritage grant of £41,200. The project ran from March 2019 until March 2020. The project was overseen by the Blanchland Abbey Project Management Group, which comprised members of the BCDO and PCC, with support from several independent heritage consultants, Tristan Spicer of Doonan Architects Ltd and initially the project officer of Inspired North East (Newcastle Diocese). Day-to-day project management was carried out by two heritage consultants, firstly Toni Bush until August 2019 and when she moved away from the area, Yvonne Conchie was appointed to manage the remainder of the project.

The Blanchland Abbey Project comprised professional advice and support to create a heritage management plan for the Abbey, and options for re-ordering the nave and North transept to make it more useable in the 21st century. This would involve improving the space for different types of service, improving access, installing kitchen and toilet facilities and installing heating, of which there is none at present. The Abbey has excellent acoustics, and possible resonance chambers have been discovered beneath the floor as a result of geophysical surveys. The Abbey Alive! consultation day, in November 2019, attracted around 500 people and showcased music and other events which could take place in the Abbey. It was also an opportunity for people to comment on the various options for improvements to the Abbey.

Many new volunteers have taken part in activities and skills training so that they can be involved in the future care of the Abbey and making the heritage of the Abbey and the village a greater part of the offer to visitors and residents alike. The number of volunteers has increased from 6 to 39 and the churchwardens are now confident that this support will help to maintain the Abbey. Local businesses have also been involved in the project by providing venues for events and marketing support, for example.

The approved purposes of the Resilient Heritage project have been met, and the outcomes for heritage, people and communities have been achieved.

"I think it has been a great opportunity for non-churchgoing local people to get involved in the future of the abbey and its place in the village, in a way that wouldn't previously have felt possible. I am not at all religious but I appreciate the abbey as a beautiful ancient building with a rich heritage and I'm pleased that there is now a chance to help shape its future for a range of purposes in addition to religious services (while recognising that these are still a key part of the life of the abbey for many people)." (Volunteer survey response)

2. Background to the Blanchland Abbey Project

The Abbey Church of St Mary is the parish church of Blanchland, a small village of around 80 residents (compared to 135 in 2011) in south Northumberland, close to the border with Co. Durham and within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the UNESCO Global Geopark. The church (listed Grade 1) was originally part of the 12C Premonstratensian Abbey, and some of the monastic buildings remain and form the centre of the village (a Scheduled Ancient Monument), making the church and village of national heritage importance as one of the most complete Premonstratensian abbeys in England. It appears that Blanchland is the only village in the UK which is built on the footprint of a medieval abbey.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) and the Blanchland Community Development Organisation (BCDO) identified the need to provide a sustainable future for the church and for the village and its residents. The regular congregation is few in number (around a dozen people) and most members are elderly, so the church relies on tourism to bring in income to maintain the building and contribute to the Parish Share. The PCC and BCDO recognised that there was limited heritage interpretation in and around the church to explain the history and importance of the site to visitors, and no clear heritage management plan in place to ensure that the church would have a sustainable future.

Alongside the potential to develop the offer for visitors to Blanchland, the church could provide an excellent location for events and activities for local residents. Most of Blanchland village is owned by the Lord Crewe Charity, which has been the major landowner since 1721. The majority of the houses are let to tenants of the Charity. As the population is ageing (55% of residents were aged over 65 in 2011) and older tenants are moving into care or dying, new tenants are moving in to the village and the community has struggled somewhat to enable the newcomers to connect with the human and physical heritage of Blanchland. The Blanchland Abbey Project seeks to find ways to engage more local residents, not just for the duration of the project but on a long term basis afterwards.

In order to develop these ideas, the BCDO, with the PCC, successfully applied for a Resilient Heritage grant of £41,200 and the project ran from March 2019 until March 2020. The project was overseen by the Blanchland Abbey Project Management Group, which comprised members of the BCDO and PCC, with support from several independent heritage consultants, latterly Tristan Spicer of Doonan Architects Ltd and initially the project officer of Inspired North East (Newcastle Diocese). Day-to-day project management was carried out by two heritage consultants, firstly Toni Bush until August 2019 and when she moved away from the area, Yvonne Conchie was appointed to manage the remainder of the project.

The vision of the Blanchland Heritage Project was to develop the Abbey as a place of sacred and heritage significance, and as a venue for arts and education. The development planning, research, surveying, consultations and governance review have formed the basis of the forthcoming project, "The Four As of Blanchland: acoustics, archaeology and audiences, in an Abbey", for which grant funding will be sought. The 4As will cover:

- Further archaeological investigations
- Acoustic investigations about the suspected resonance chambers beneath the floor
- Archival research for heritage interpretation, genealogical research and updating the 1969 Village Atlas
- Audience development and community engagement
- Heritage planning: the architectural proposals will be modified according to the archaeological and acoustic investigations
- Create a social enterprise, Blanchland Heritage Charitable Incorporated Organisation so the community can take greater ownership of the Abbey, and heritage assets are embedded in the local economy

The Approved Purposes for the 2019/20 Blanchland Heritage Project were:

- a - The appointment of a consultant Project Manager (40 days work during the project)
- b - Recruitment of 36 volunteers from the local community
- c - Delivery of training for staff and volunteers in: conservation management, heritage interpretation, ICT, communications, fundraising, finance and governance
- d - Visits, for representatives of the management group and volunteers, to six heritage villages across the UK to look at good practice in terms of their offer and management
- e - Consultation with stakeholders and partners to inform plans for the future extended use of the Abbey Church and its heritage. This will look at four areas of common interest in its use: as a sacred space, as a tourist venue, as a venue for the arts and as an educational resource.
- f - Research into and production of a detailed report on the tourism potential for Blanchland
- g - Production of a Heritage Management Plan for Blanchland Abbey
- h - Evaluation of options and production of a strategy for the future use and development of the church
- i - Development of a funding strategy for the 'Future Blanchland' heritage regeneration scheme
- j - Exploration, development and implementation of a new governance model for the future management of the site and associated projects
- k - Development of a Communications Plan and website improvements

The project plan for the Resilient Heritage project comprised:

- Community engagement events to encourage local residents to become involved
- Consultation with stakeholder organisations
- Developing a fundraising strategy to support the forthcoming Future Blanchland project
- Researching the tourism potential of Blanchland Abbey
- Visiting other heritage villages in Britain to find out about best practice elsewhere
- Creating a new governance structure to manage the Abbey's heritage
- Options appraisal for the Abbey as:
 - A sacred space
 - A tourist venue
 - A major arts venue
 - An educational resource
- Developing a heritage management plan for the Abbey
- Creating a communications plan and rebuild the Blanchland website

The logic model (see Appendix) sets out the approved purposes, outputs, outcomes and longer term impacts of the Blanchland Abbey Project.

3. Evaluation methodology

An independent consultant, Nicola Bell, was appointed at the start of the project to develop an evaluation framework based on the project plan, liaise with the project team throughout, and write the final evaluation report. The evaluation was carried out in such a way that it is useful to the community, to celebrate and record what has been achieved, and to inform future project developments and grant applications.

A Pie & Pea supper was held in April 2019 to share project ideas with local residents and seek their ideas for the Abbey and the village's future, and to encourage people to take part as volunteers. Throughout the project, regular get-togethers were held so that volunteers could share their opinions on the project's progress, which formed part of the formative evaluation. A consultation day was held at the Abbey in November to present the options for installing heating, a kitchen / servery and toilet, and to seek people's opinions via a paper and online survey, to which there were 44 responses.

A tourism survey, written by the tourism consultant, was carried out with visitors to Blanchland in late summer / autumn 2019, using paper surveys available for self-completion in the Abbey and the White Monk tea room (101 responses). The results of the survey are in Appendix 1 of the Blanchland Futures Tourism Study, prepared by tourism consultant Andrew Duff. This gave information about visitor

demographics, motivations, frequency of visiting, where visitors were from, and was applicable to people visiting either the Abbey or the village as a whole. The responses have informed the project team's planning for the Abbey as a visitor destination, how the Abbey fits with the heritage of Blanchland, and how this can best be presented to visitors.

The project managers have kept comprehensive records of meetings and other activities so that the project has been kept on track throughout (formative evaluation) and these records have been reviewed at the end of the project to demonstrate that the approved purposes and the actions set out in the project plan have been achieved.

An online survey was carried out with the volunteers (15 responses from a total of 39 volunteers). The independent evaluator carried out a summative phone discussion with the project team (the Chair of the BCDO, one church warden, the church treasurer and the project manager) at the end of the project which informed this final evaluation report.

4. Achieving the Approved Purposes

a - The appointment of a consultant Project Manager (40 days work during the project)

A consultant Project Manager was appointed to manage the Blanchland Abbey Project to bring extra skills and capacity to the team. Toni Bush managed the first part of the project until summer 2019, and then because she moved away from the area, Yvonne Conchie took over and managed the remainder of the project.

Although 40 days was allocated to this role, this was not enough and in total the two Project Managers carried out 55 days in order to deliver all the strands of the project. A day rate of £250 had been allocated, which is at the lower end of heritage consultants' rates. When planning future projects, it would be advisable to budget for a higher daily rate (say £350 - £400) in order to make the role more viable for self-employed consultants, who have to cover their own business insurance, pension, equipment etc.

b - Recruitment of 36 volunteers from the local community

39 volunteers were recruited and they worked on five themes:

- 6 on community engagement
- 10 on history and archaeology
- 9 on tourism and communications
- 6 on governance
- 8 organised the major Abbey Alive! consultation event (23rd November)

The volunteers have carried out 1350 hours of work during the course of the project.

Community Engagement & Communications group:

The volunteers shared and gathered feedback on the project plans and progress in both traditional and digital ways with people from the local community, the wider region and beyond.

Tourism group:

The volunteers found out through the visitor survey who visits Blanchland and why, what they think of their experience and whether they would come back. They researched and visited other communities and heritage villages to find out how they welcome visitors and to gain ideas for how the visitor experience to Blanchland can be improved. They have planned a number of future activities, which unfortunately are on hold because of the Covid-19 restrictions.

History & Archaeology group:

The volunteers researched more about Blanchland Abbey. They went to Northumberland Archives to look for material relating to Blanchland. They carried out some archaeology surveying and recording at the Abbey, alongside professional archaeologists.

Abbey Church group:

The volunteers worked on ways to maintain the Abbey as a sacred place of worship, considering its special significance within the heart of the community and how it can be developed to become a centre of historical importance. They planned how to promote the Abbey space by improving facilities and information for tourists and visitors. They worked on developing the long-term conservation management of the Abbey with the focus on the needs of the village and its inhabitants and the sustainable future for church and its heritage.

c - Delivery of training for staff and volunteers in: conservation management, heritage interpretation, ICT, communications, fundraising, finance and governance

39 volunteers took part in training in the following topics, via workshops, practical exercises and online training (for website development):

- Archaeology and surveying – Architectural Services Durham University
- Architectural heritage of the Abbey and village – Peter Ryder, architectural historian
- Digital communications with visitors – Yvonne Conchie, project manager
- Website development – Firefly Media
- Archives – Northumberland Archives
- Heritage management – Dr Robert Young, consultant
- Heritage interpretation – Jo Scott, consultant

- Finance – Finance officer for Newcastle Cathedral’s Common Ground in Sacred Space project
- Fundraising – Yvonne Conchie, project manager
- Governance – Northumberland County Council Social Enterprise Team

This training has given the volunteers the necessary skills to manage and care for the Abbey, present it to visitors, and to communicate effectively with visitors and local residents. The governance training has helped the PCC and BCDO to consider the necessary tasks which a new joint management organisation would need to do to manage the Abbey effectively in the future, and various options such as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation have been considered.

*“Having the PCC and BCDO working together via a new formalised partnership seems a good way forward, with a good team of interested local people.”
(Volunteer survey response)*

d - Visits, for representatives of the management group and volunteers, to six heritage villages across the UK to look at good practice in terms of their offer and management

Members of the project team and volunteers visited:

- Norham, Ford & Etal (Northumberland)
- Ripley, Thoresby Park, Southwell Minster, Laxton (Midlands)
- Nenthead, Lanercost and Hexham (Cumbria and Northumberland)



Interpretation at Laxton

They also visited Hartburn Church, Northumberland, to see how the church had improved access for people with disabilities, installed a kitchen and toilets, and installed ground source heating.

The Chair of the management group also visited Tetbury and Minchinhampton churches in Gloucestershire, and St Aidan's Bamburgh (Northumberland).

e - Consultation with stakeholders and partners to inform plans for the future extended use of the Abbey Church and its heritage. This will look at four areas of common interest in its use: as a sacred space, as a tourist venue, as a venue for the arts and as an educational resource.

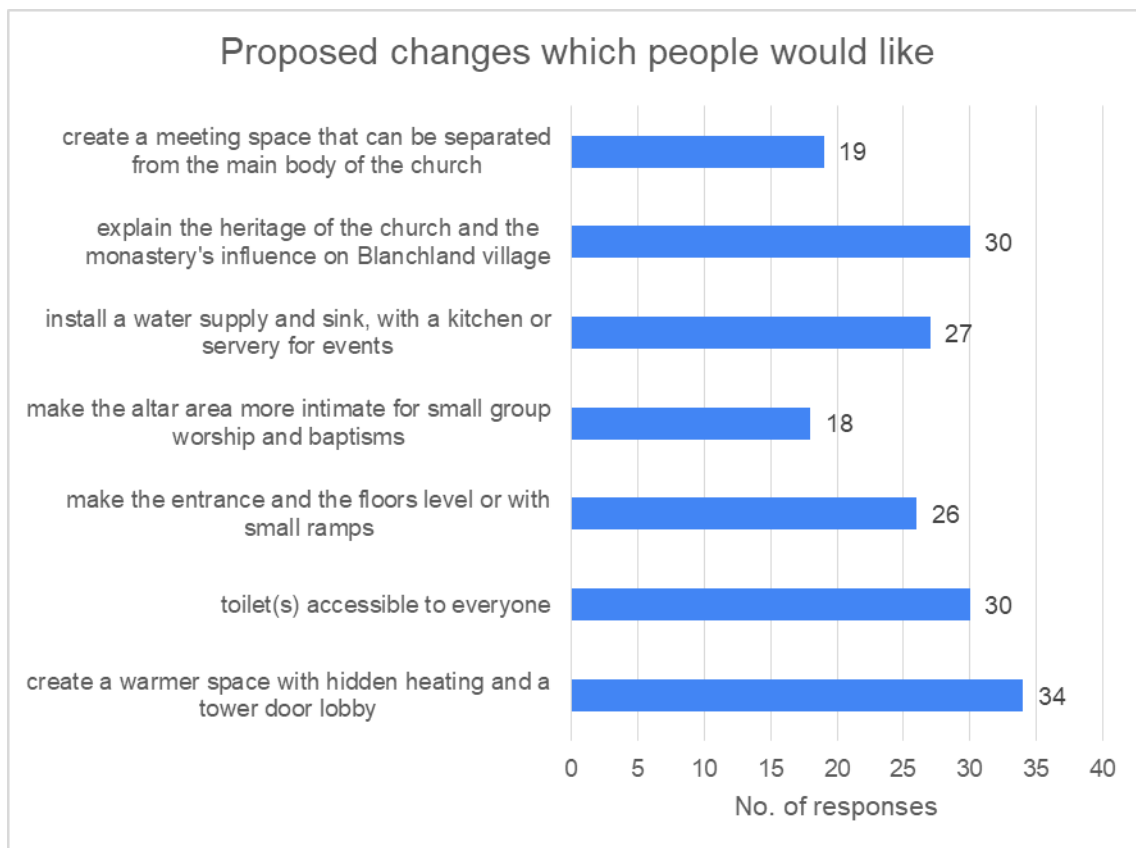
A pie and pea supper was held in April 2019 to tell local residents about the project and proposals for the Abbey, and to encourage people to become volunteers. This resulted in 24 volunteers signing up (in addition to the 6 existing volunteers), and a further 9 volunteers joined later on in the project, making a total of 39.

A consultation day, Abbey Alive!, was held in November 2019 to present Doonan Architects' four alternative proposals for making the Abbey more useable for a variety of different types of service and so it could be used as a performance space, and alternatives for installing kitchen and toilet facilities (see section h below). The day included a programme of musical performances, history talks, art and craft activities and new displays about the history of the Abbey and the village. This was an opportunity for people to see how the Abbey could be used for performance and creative activities as well as a worship space.



Music, creativity and consultation at Abbey Alive!

Around 500 people attended the event and 44 gave their opinions on the proposed changes for the Abbey, either on the day or via an online survey, about how physical aspects of the Abbey could be improved:



Additional comments were:

- i. Rear access still required for funeral coffins to churchyard.
- ii. Create a performance space
- iii. Toilets are very important! I don't know anything about the needs of locals and the congregation – they should make such decisions; too many to write down. 2x WC disabled plus one other
- iv. BELLS!; need for bells
- v. Make disabled access; preserve as much as possible while making accessible to all

The Abbey has great potential as an educational resource and visit destination for schools, and for informal learning by children and adults. However it is not practicable to offer schools visits at present because there is no heating in the church so it is too cold and damp, the electricity supply is inadequate and there is poor access into the building. Nevertheless, the Abbey's unique heritage setting, excellent acoustics and large seating capacity set it apart from other venues in the area. Consultations have taken place with local schools to find out what teachers would like to gain from a visit to the Abbey. The whole of Whittonstall First School visited the Abbey in November and took part in a range of different activities to test out what would be effective for school visits.

f - Research into and production of a detailed report on the tourism potential for Blanchland

Tourism consultant Andrew Duff was appointed to carry out research on the tourism potential of the Abbey and the village. This comprised a small visitor survey (101 responses) carried out via self-completion questionnaires at the Abbey, the Lord Crewe Arms hotel and the White Monk Tea Room in Blanchland in late summer and autumn 2019, comparison with a similar visitor survey carried out in 2017, desk research and telephone interviews with other local visitor attractions.

The report made the following priority recommendations:

- P1. The Abbey open and welcoming with a clear invitation to visitors – with actions including 'church open' signage, visibility, accessibility and 'brand' messages.*
- P2. Strengthening the engagement with, and value of, existing types of visitor – with actions including enhanced interpretation, visitor leaflet, souvenirs to reinforce memories, repeat visits and recommendations.*
- P3. Encouraging visitors to spend more time exploring and enjoying Blanchland – with possible actions including development of a visitor trail and souvenir guide covering both Abbey and village.*
- P4. Attracting more young families to visit and explore – with actions including creation of a family-friendly church and village trail, activity pack and suggestions for events.*
- P5. Widening the appeal to younger/mid-life adults – with actions including contemporary themed interpretation and media apps connecting the key experiences of the North Pennines, 'eco-tourism'/'astro-tourism', and new arts and cultural experiences.*
- P6. Strengthening the appeal of the Abbey and village for cyclists and walkers – with actions including specific welcome messages and collaboration on promoting trail routes and facilities.*
- P7. Considering ways of engaging with other under-represented audiences – including visitors affected by disabilities, poor access to transport, dependency upon EV charge-points or other challenges.*
- P8. Engaging effectively with the local community and tourism partners – with actions including developing skills in heritage interpretation, story-telling, guiding, creation and care of archive material.*

These recommendations are developed further in Part 2 of the report, A Draft Action Plan, with suggested actions, ideas and examples, and an indication of how these may help to contribute towards the objectives of the forthcoming 4As project. Whilst some actions would require significant investment in capital works, a number of short term /quick win actions are suggested – including designing new materials, trails and marketing, also modest investment in signage, that could be taken forward at relatively modest cost.

The tourism consultant considered that in the short term, modest and achievable steps would help raise the profile of the Abbey and demonstrate to local people and visitors that change is afoot, and hopefully stimulate new interest in getting involved with the life of the church (whether as a visitor, participant or a volunteer). This would also provide valuable feedback to inform likely demand for new facilities and activities. By working with the local community and tourism providers, this would help to ensure that the actions will complement the wider village offer and add value to the overall visitor experience.

g - Production of a Heritage Management Plan for Blanchland Abbey

The Inspired North East Project Officer was to have prepared the Heritage Management Plan, but following his move to another post in June 2019, heritage consultant Dr Robert Young was appointed to create the Heritage Management Plan. This gives a comprehensive assessment of the heritage importance of the Abbey and Statement of Significance, and sets out how the building can best be managed in the future with regard to the maintenance of the fabric, and with regard to how the Abbey might be used in the future. The Heritage Management Plan recognises that the Abbey's place as a key part of the local community (for residents and tourists) must be strengthened, so that it gives the Abbey a viable future. The community role of the Abbey and the care of its structure go hand in hand.

The Heritage Management Plan set out the following policies which should be achieved:

1. Governance

Create a new management body which will share responsibility for the building between the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and Blanchland Community Development Organisation (BCDO). Blanchland Abbey is already taking part in Rural Churches for Everyone, a Newcastle Diocese project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which will provide advice, support and training for 40 rural churches in the Diocese.

2. Better understanding of the church fabric

A detailed internal ground plan of the Church, with associated external elevations, has been completed. This will allow the complex external fabric to be better understood and interpreted. Further work is required, however, on the internal elevations, especially the upper part of the tower, with its unusual features at belfry level. A detailed, modern, surveyed plan of the Churchyard, showing all graves and related structures, would also facilitate better understanding of the conservation issues faced by this important part of the Church's infrastructure. A range of architectural and archaeological techniques will be used to achieve this.

3. Maintenance and repair of the church fabric

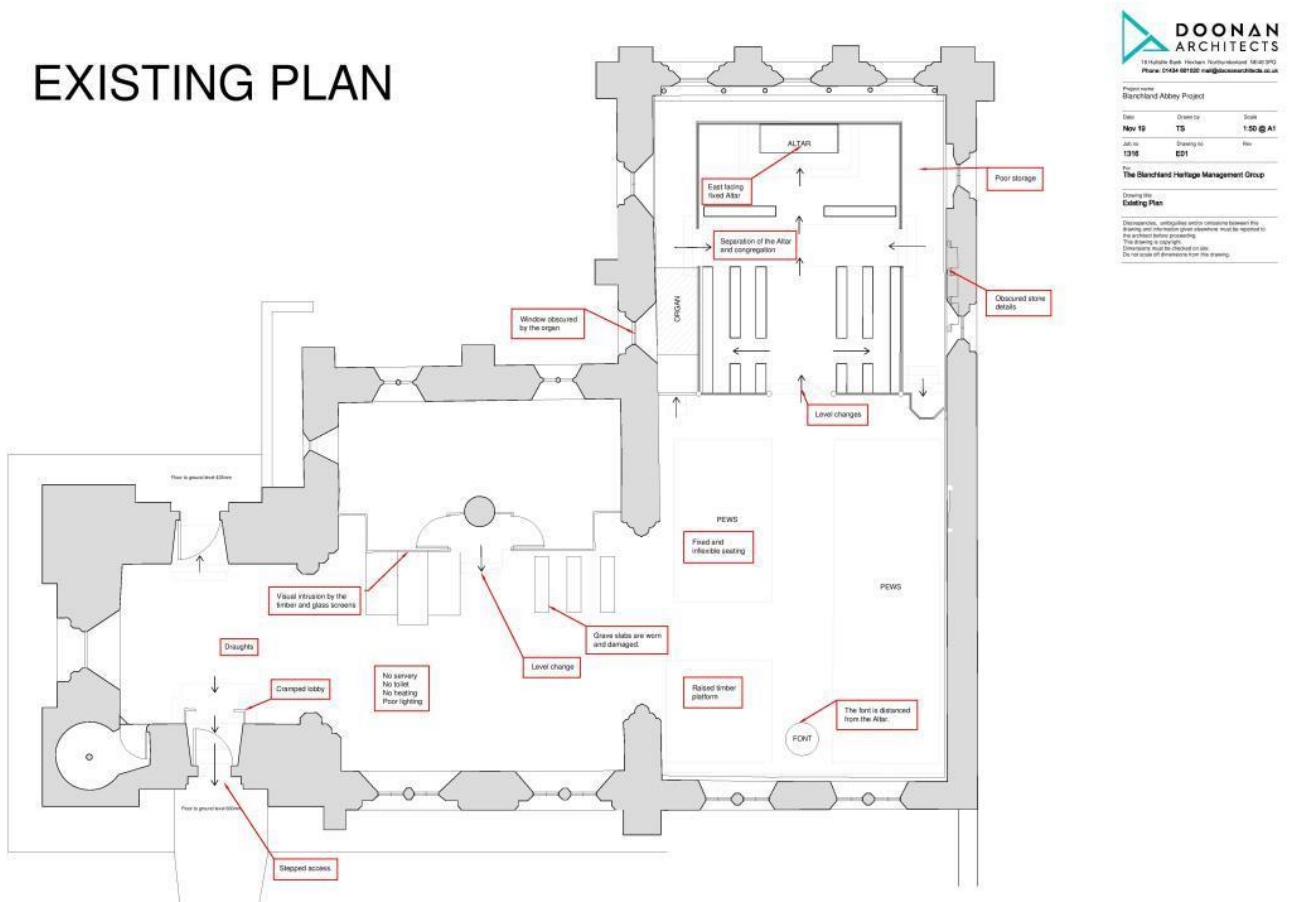
The fabric will be maintained in accordance with the quinquennial survey and a longer term, rolling, programme of capital works will be created to ensure that potentially larger scale threats to the significance of the structure are dealt with at an early stage.

4. Redevelopment of internal arrangements within the church to fit it better for purpose in the 21st century

This will comprise improving the worship space; installing environmentally-sensitive heating and lighting systems; installing kitchen and toilet facilities; disability audit and improved access; disaster management plan; bat survey.

h - Evaluation of options and production of a strategy for the future use and development of the church

Doonan Architects Ltd created options for re-ordering the nave to make it a more useable space for different forms of worship, from small worship groups to large weddings and funerals; improving access to the Abbey; creating a meeting space; installing kitchen and toilet facilities.



Options for elements within the nave:

Rood screen:

- A - leave in current location
- B – move East in front of altar
- C – remove entirely

Storage:

- A – retain screened storage around altar
- B – new timber cupboard beneath West window
- C – repurpose rood screen as part of new cupboard

Font:

- A – across aisle from organ
- B – between rood screen and pews
- C – beneath North window, next to altar

Options for tower and side chapel:

- A – large lobby, kitchen servery
- B – large lobby, kitchen in a box room
- C – small porch, extension, structural glass
- D – large lobby, extension, timber windows

Options for side chapel arches:

- A and B – open arches
- C – structural glass
- D – timber framed window

Options for kitchen:

- A – servery in cupboard with mobile counter
- B – small, in timber room in side chapel
- C – small, in new extension with accessible WC
- D – large, in new extension with accessible WC

Options for meeting space:

- A and B – no defined meeting space, could use heritage space
- C – Large, with heritage display
- D - Large, but with heritage display outside

Options for tower lobby:

- A, B and D – Full width lobby with accessible WC
- C – Small lobby, just over West door

- New water connection and drainage
- Underfloor heating utilising a ground source heat pump
- Improve the access path to avoid step
- Install gravel margin around the building in grave yard to improve drainage

i - Development of a funding strategy for the 'Future Blanchland' heritage regeneration scheme

It was always anticipated that this Resilient Heritage project would lead on to a further "Future Blanchland" project. The research and community consultations carried out within the Resilient Heritage project has resulted in the 4As project (see section 2 above) which will form the next application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project team have received training in developing a fundraising strategy to raise match funding for the 4As project from project manager Yvonne Conchie.

j - Exploration, development and implementation of a new governance model for the future management of the site and associated projects

The PCC and BCDO recognised that the Abbey could be managed more effectively in its role as a church and as a community asset if a new organisation was created to manage it. This would involve the ownership of the Abbey moving from the PCC to the new organisation, with the agreement of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. Northumberland County Council's Social Enterprise Team delivered a training day for the PCC, BCDO and some of volunteers to discuss how this new governance arrangement could be implemented, and possible options of the type of organisation which would be appropriate, such as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This would mean that the local community, and hopefully the Lord Crewe's Charity, would be more involved in the management of the Abbey and its relationship to the village as a heritage asset.

k - Development of a Communications Plan and website improvements

The Community Engagement and Communications team of volunteers received training from project manager Yvonne Conchie in using digital methods to communicate with visitors. A Facebook Page, a Facebook Group and an Instagram page have been set up. The Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/BlanchlandAbbey/>) is about the Blanchland Abbey Project, and the project set up the Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BlanchlandCommunity>) with the intention of the wider sharing of local information, including about the project and the Abbey. A WhatsApp group was set up for the project volunteers to share information with each other.

A communications plan has also been created.

The Blanchland Community website, <https://blanchland.org/>, has been re-designed by Firefly New Media UK and project manager Toni Bush. It provides information about the Abbey and the village, and news about the Blanchland Abbey Project. The website provides a resource for local residents and visitors. It was originally intended that the website would be a forum for volunteers and residents to share information about the Blanchland Abbey Project and other community news and events, but in practice the social media platforms described above have been a more effective way for people to communicate with each other.

5. Outcomes for heritage

Resilient Heritage projects create outcomes for heritage, people and communities. This section of the report describes how the outcomes for heritage set out in the application for the Blanchland Abbey Project have been met.

New governance structure for the care and development of Blanchland Abbey

The PCC and BCDO considered that a new governance structure should be created to manage the Abbey and increase its role as a community asset. This may involve transferring the ownership of the Abbey from the PCC to the new organisation, with the agreement of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. It is a measure of the success of the Blanchland Abbey Project that the community is now so involved and there is such a level of commitment to the Abbey.

The PCC and BCDO received advice from Northumberland County Council's Social Enterprise Team, who led a Strategy Day in December 2019 for members of the PCC and BCDO, a representative of the Lord Crewe Charity, and volunteers from other village organisations. The participants discussed their vision for the Abbey's future, and the Social Enterprise Team suggested how best to take this forward. The PCC, BCDO and Newcastle Diocese are seeking legal advice to set up a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, or similar entity, to manage the Abbey and its heritage.

*"The NCC Strategy and Governance training day was a highlight that showed how well, as a group, we can really work together. Very interesting also to see the interaction of individuals, their strengths and weaknesses but also their overall intent to preserve and enhance the heritage and beauty of Blanchland."
(Steering Group member)*

*"I don't have much knowledge about organisational matters, but the proposed structure discussed seems reasonable to me. I think it could be effective as it comprises enthusiastic people who (although, like me, are not necessarily expert or experienced at management) are willing to learn and help each other."
(Volunteer survey response)*

New heritage management and development strategy

The Heritage Management Plan prepared by Dr Robert Young has set out the priorities for the future management of the fabric of the Abbey, and developments to make the building fit for purpose – making the space more useable for different types of worship and installing heating, kitchen and toilet facilities. These works will require further architectural and archaeological surveys to be carried out, which will form part of the forthcoming “The Four As of Blanchland: acoustics, archaeology and audiences, in an Abbey” grant application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Doonan Architects Ltd developed options for re-ordering the nave so that it can be used more effectively for different types of service, from small worship groups to large weddings and funerals, options for installing kitchen and toilet facilities, a new heating system (there is no heating at present) and improved access for people with disabilities. This will make the Abbey a more accessible and comfortable place for people and will enable more events and activities to take place there. This in turn will encourage more people (local residents and tourists) to use the Abbey and will provide increased income.

A geophysical survey of the Abbey (comprising ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and earth electrical resistance surveys) was carried out by Archaeological Services Durham University. This showed evidence of previous buildings and structures, and possible acoustic pits beneath the nave of the Abbey. It is thought that they were installed to create the exceptional acoustics within the Abbey. This more detailed knowledge of the historic structure of the Abbey and associated buildings will help inform the future management of the Abbey and its surroundings, and will provide additional information for new heritage interpretation.

Improving the heritage interpretation at the Abbey is a priority, and this will be done once the further architectural and archaeological investigations are completed.

“Any interpretation must be kept fresh and up to date but must not overwhelm the atmosphere of the church.” (Volunteer survey response)

In Spring 2020 the Abbey hosted Travelling Treasure, the touring exhibition created by heritage interpretation consultant Jo Scott, with design and fabrication by Marcus Byron, as part of Inspired Futures¹. Travelling Treasure focuses on different aspects of church life and church buildings, and each church which hosts it is encouraged to add material applicable to its own venue. The exhibition is lightweight and easily transported, and it has inspired the Blanchland Abbey volunteers to consider a similar format to test temporary interpretation during the course of the 4As project,

¹ Inspired Futures, managed by Newcastle Diocese and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, gave 18 churches in the Newcastle and Durham Dioceses advice, support and mentoring to give them a more sustainable future and increased community use.

prior to permanent interpretation being installed. Any interpretation panels would need to be removed when weddings are held at the Abbey, so using the robust but lightweight (and recyclable) materials² as used for Travelling Treasure would be an ideal solution.



Travelling Treasure touring exhibition

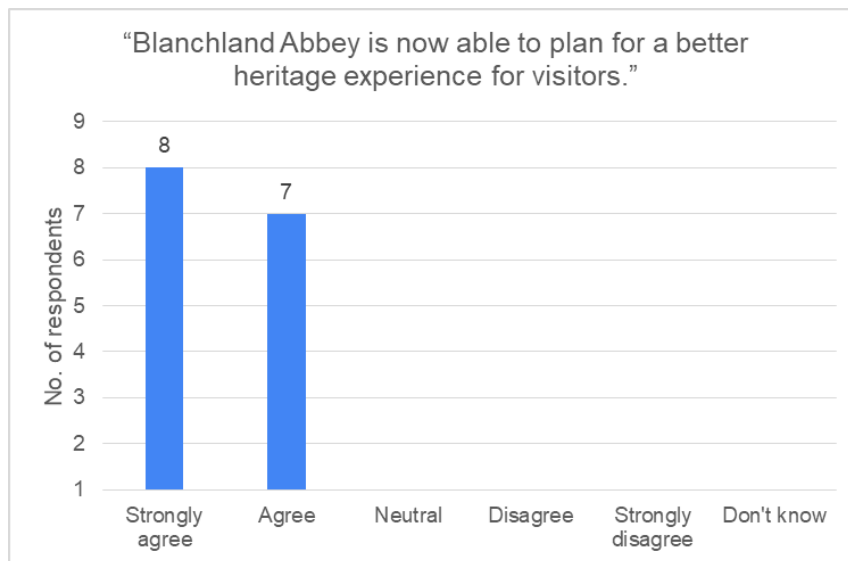


Detail of lightweight, transportable, recyclable construction

The volunteers were asked in an online survey whether they thought that the Abbey is now able to offer a better heritage experience to visitors, as a result of the research

² Dufaylite Graphic 3D Lite paper honeycomb board, 100% recycled core, FSC certified facing:
<https://dufaylite.com/graphics>

and other activities which have been carried out, and the training which the volunteers have received:



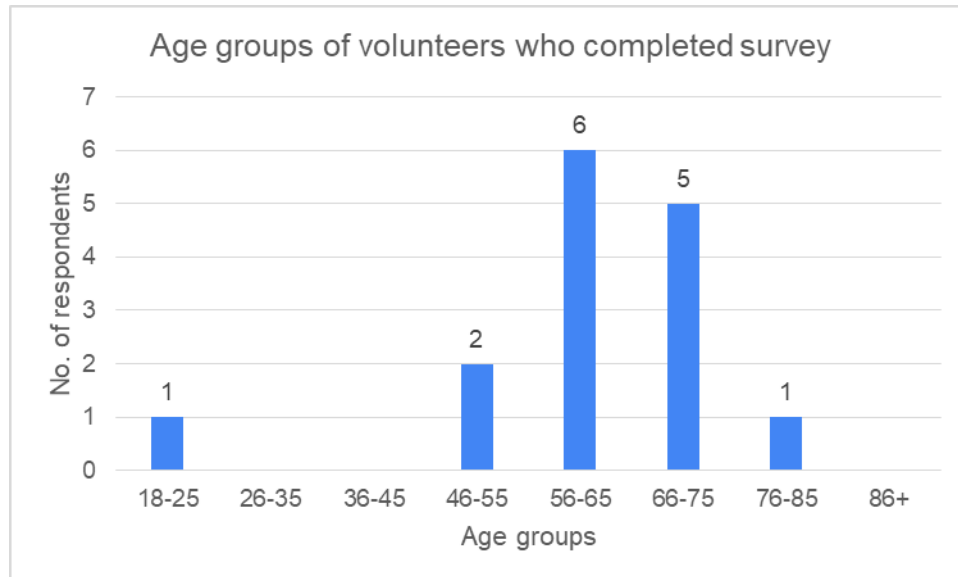
Involve a wider group of people in the care of the Abbey and its sustainable future

When the Resilient Heritage project began, six people were involved altogether, as members of the PCC and / or the BCDO. A community consultation event was held in April 2019 to present the project and encourage more people to take part. Four groups were set up to encourage more volunteers to take part:

- History, Architecture and Archaeology: to carry out research into the Abbey's past. Having a better understanding of the Abbey's history will enable it to be managed more effectively in the future.
- Tourism: carrying out a survey with visitors to find out who is visiting (and who is not), and how the church and village can be presented better to visitors. Visiting other heritage villages to see what can be learned from others' experiences.
- Community engagement and communications: finding out what the Abbey and the village mean to local residents and what developments they would like to see in the future. Improving the Blanchland website.
- Abbey Church: To maintain as a sacred place of worship and its special significance within the heart of the community and how it can be developed to become a centre of historical importance. Promoting the Abbey space to improve facilities and information for tourists and visitors. Developing the long-term conservation management of the Abbey with the focus on the needs of the village and its inhabitants and the sustainable future for church and its heritage.

This approach attracted 29 new volunteers to become involved in the project, so there are 39 involved altogether. The volunteers are residents of Blanchland and

neighbouring villages. Several of the volunteers have had long-standing connections with the Abbey and some have become involved with the Abbey for the first time. Most of the volunteers are aged over 50 but there are some younger people as well. The chart below shows the age groups of the people who completed the volunteers' survey, but does not reflect the ages of all the volunteers:



The churchwardens had been concerned about what would happen to the church if they were not able to continue as churchwardens, but now that they know how much the church and village means to the community and how much they want to be involved, they are confident that the church will be looked after by the community in the future.

Conservation management group set up

The conservation volunteers group is progressing with the recommendations put forward in the Heritage Management Plan. The conservation management group will form part of the new management organisation, once it is set up. This will ensure that the fabric of the Abbey is correctly maintained in the future.

Develop skills to care for Blanchland Abbey

The volunteers and project team attended a number of training workshops, including archaeology surveying, conservation maintenance, architectural history, archive research and heritage interpretation. The strategy day delivered by the Northumberland County Council Social Enterprise Team provided guidance about the best form of future governance for the Abbey.

The project team considered that they had benefitted a great deal from the training:

"I have learned significant things about heritage interpretation. The governance training was refreshingly well done. It moved us on in a way I hadn't imagined

and showed how we could develop a new management structure.” (Project team member)

6. Outcomes for people

More people are involved in caring for Blanchland Abbey

The section above outlines the number of people involved in caring for the Abbey and the roles they are carrying out, and notes that many new people have become involved, some of whom did not have a previous connection with the Abbey. The project team are very encouraged by how many people in the local community are taking part and showing support for the Abbey’s future. A demonstration of this is the possibility that the new governance structure for managing the Abbey will be a new charitable organisation of which the community is a partner, rather than the Abbey remaining in the ownership of the PCC.

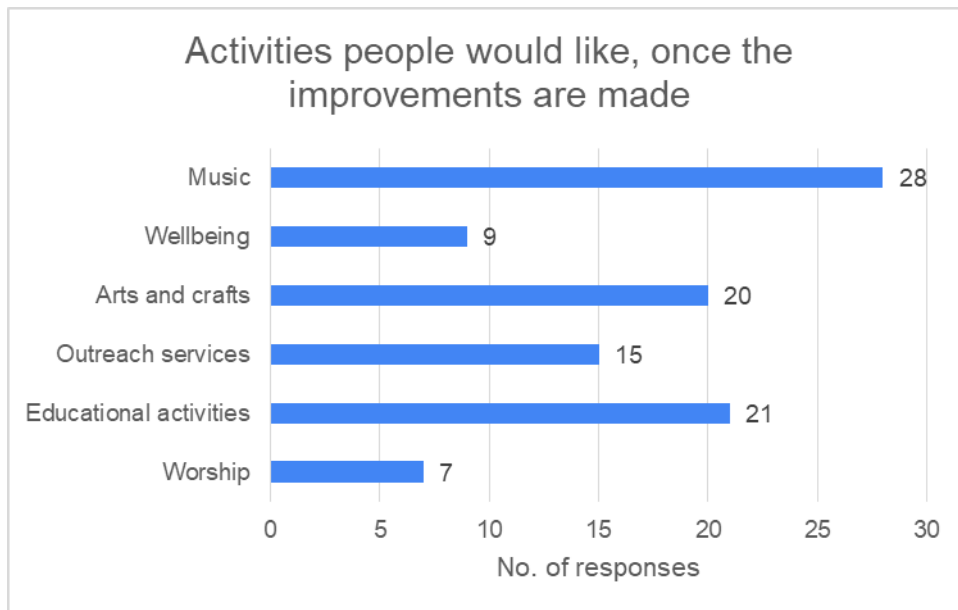
“The project has brought local people together in a positive way, including those of us not normally involved with the church but who want to help support this wonderful ancient building and make the village as a whole a sustainable, attractive place to live and visit. The Abbey Alive event in particular was a successful and inspiring team effort. It was great to get to know fellow local residents better through working together.” (Volunteer survey respondent)

“I think it has been a great opportunity for non-churchgoing local people to get involved in the future of the abbey and its place in the village, in a way that wouldn't previously have felt possible. I am not at all religious but I appreciate the abbey as a beautiful ancient building with a rich heritage and I'm pleased that there is now a chance to help shape its future for a range of purposes in addition to religious services (while recognising that these are still a key part of the life of the abbey for many people).” (Volunteer survey respondent)

“Even just the act of planning and discussion has been helpful in building a community feeling.” (Volunteer survey respondent)

The Abbey is used for more events and activities, in addition to services

The Abbey Alive! Consultation day in November was an opportunity to present various activities which could be held in the Abbey, such as music, art and craft, and heritage talks. Occasional music performances and other cultural events happen at present, but as the Abbey has no heating it is not ideal as a venue, despite the excellent acoustics. The consultation day, and responses to an online survey, showed that people are keen that a wider range of events and activities should take place in the Abbey:



Further suggestions for activities in the Abbey were:

- i. Choir, meditation, history group, bible study group, a crèche facility to encourage all family members to visit
- ii. Create space for Art exhibitions, festivals and drama
- iii. Music of all genres, film
- iv. Christmas music, local school choirs, mindfulness activities, stained glass windows and older crafts, school trips and tours
- v. Yoga class, painting, pottery, history talks, puppet shows, I live in Berwick (former resident) so would never come unless visiting the village
- vi. Singing, orchestral, socialise, crafty things for children, we come here anyway! We'd like a service every week but understand why we don't.
- Christmas Market
- vii. Choral, meditation
- viii. Art exhibitions
- ix. Concerts films
- x. Confidence building, Christian activities, experimental and family services for non-regulars. A permanent exhibition for Blanchland's many visitors. Large notice boards outside encouraging people to visit
- xi. Folk music, chamber concerts, choral works, mindfulness, library, art fairs.
- xii. Bespoke music festival, visiting choirs,
- xiii. All above but with care as church needs to remain welcoming to visitors so events/activities must still allow that.

"Everything we did went well, the "Abbey alive day" was a special event for me I think it brought the whole community together as one." (Volunteer survey response)

New volunteering opportunities created

The four project groups, the training workshops, organising the Abbey Alive! day and taking part in the archaeology surveying and geophysics have all been new opportunities for the volunteers. Some of the volunteers will take part in running the new management organisation, and this will continue into the new 4As project (see above).

"Abbey Alive! brought out so much more than we anticipated. There was so much enthusiasm and key people want to be involved." (Project team member)

"We will continue to go to the archives to get more information [about the Abbey], outside of the project." (Project team member)

Volunteers take part in training to develop skills to secure a sustainable future for the Abbey

The training workshops have been described above, and the skills learned will enable the volunteers and management group to provide a sustainable future for the Abbey. Training in finance and fundraising will enable the team to raise match funding for the forthcoming 4As project.

In response to the question about what went well with the project, one of the volunteers said:

"The community involvement, sense of direction, education and training."

However one volunteer commented that he had not been able to attend the organised events which had been held during the week, because of work commitments.

Volunteers learn from the examples of other historic estate villages which attract tourists

Blanchland is an estate village, with the majority of the properties owned by the Lord Crewe's Charity and let to tenants. After Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, Blanchland was sold in 1545 and it then passed through the hands of a number of powerful Northumberland families and was eventually bought by Nathaniel, Lord Crewe, Bishop of Durham, in 1709. Lord Crewe had no heir and when he died in 1720, he left Blanchland, and all his other estates including Bamburgh, to the Lord Crewe's Charity which still owns and manages most of Blanchland village.



On the study visits

The aim of the visits was to learn good – and less successful - practice from heritage and church sites that might share some common characteristics with Blanchland.

Members of the project team and volunteers visited:

- Norham, Ford & Etal (Northumberland)
- Ripley, Thoresby Park, Southwell Minster, Laxton (Midlands)
- Nenthead, Lanercost, Hexham (Cumbria and Northumberland)

In addition the Chair of the Blanchland Abbey Project visited the churches at Tetbury and Minchinhampton in Gloucestershire and Bamburgh in Northumberland.

The project team and volunteers were surprised that in many villages, there did not seem to be a strong connection between the church and the village. In contrast, Blanchland Abbey has a strong link with the rest of Blanchland – both physically in terms of the buildings, and socially in terms of people being involved in the life of the church and helping with practical tasks – which has increased significantly during the course of the Resilient Heritage project.

The findings of the visits are available as a separate report, and the key learnings are:

- Many fine churches that were open looked closed – there needs to be a clear invitation to come in.
- Interpretation must be simple clear and with an audience in mind. It should be regularly updated to avoid being - and looking - tired.
- Few places seem to give much thought to how a church building relates to its community – evidenced in signage and interpretation – an area for improvement.
- Video/audio interpretation can date very quickly.
- The presence of people to welcome and tell the story of a place is a huge asset.

- Clean, accessible toilets matter – as does warmth.
- Disabled access requires careful thought.
- Removal of pews does not seem to diminish a sense of holiness – rather it opens buildings up so that the unique character of their space is revealed.
- Gift shops can easily be intrusive.
- Clutter and dirt are very unattractive.

These points will be put into practice as the project team and volunteers develop the Abbey's interpretation and wider offering to visitors, which will benefit both the Abbey and the village.

The project team and volunteers also visited Hartburn church (Northumberland) to find out about the ground source heating, as this may be used for the new heating in the Abbey, and how the church had installed a kitchen and toilet, and improved access for disabled people.

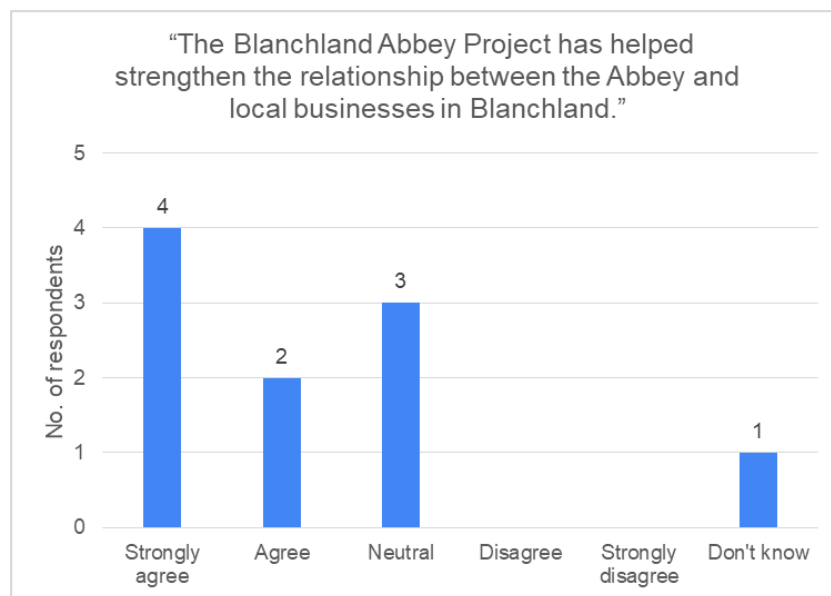
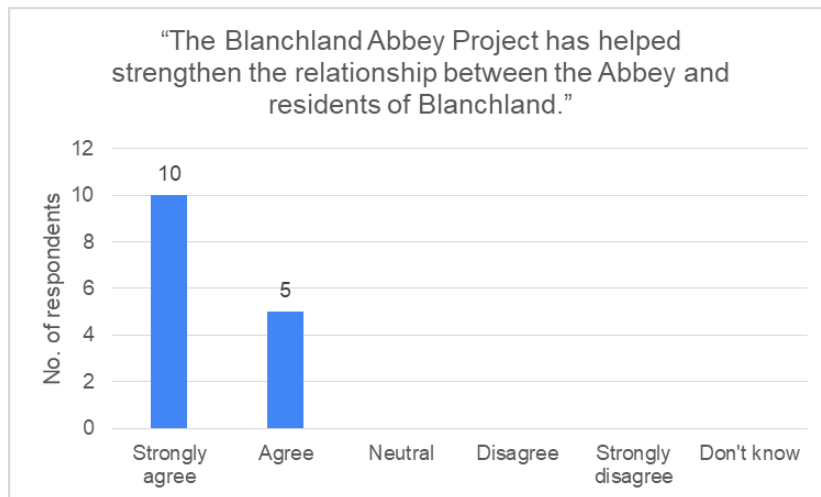
7. Outcomes for communities

More engagement with local residents

The Abbey's regular congregation, before the start of this project was small – around a dozen people attending fortnightly services, most of whom are elderly. The population of the village is also ageing, and as people have moved away to residential care or have died, it has been difficult to engage the new residents in the life of the church and the village. However the Blanchland Abbey Project has been a catalyst and has succeeded in encouraging new people to become involved with the heritage. For example, the two Churchwardens used to do all the cleaning and general maintenance in the Abbey, and now new volunteers are helping with cleaning, maintaining the churchyard and carrying out small repairs.

An online survey was carried out with the volunteers. 15 of the 39 volunteers responded (38%) which is a reasonable response rate for this type of survey. Of the respondents, 10 became volunteers as part of the Blanchland Abbey Project and five had been involved with the Abbey beforehand. One of them said they had already felt connected with the Abbey, and the others said that the project had made them feel more connected.

The charts below show to what extent the respondents think that the project has strengthened the relationship between the Abbey and residents, and with businesses:



The Abbey Alive! day attracted around 500 people, most of whom (from anecdotal responses to the organisers) were from Blanchland and neighbouring villages. The day was a very successful opportunity to share plans for the sustainable future of the Abbey and to invite the community to help shape the vision.

“The community engagement, commitment and ownership of the project has been excellent since September [when the second Project Manager began] and to an uncommonly high degree, that was remarked on by the Northumberland County Council Social Enterprise Team (who work with an awful lot of communities) and the Archdeacon [Newcastle Diocese] (who works with an awful lot of PCCs), and the local councillor (who works with a lot of parish councils). This is demonstrated through the impressive response to the Abbey Alive day and the consistent presence of volunteers at meetings and training events right through my tenure.” (second Project Manager)

Improving the village website

The village website <https://blanchland.org/> was redesigned by Firefly New Media UK and Toni Bush, the first project manager. The website has a contemporary feel and is more user-friendly than the previous one. It describes the Blanchland Abbey Project and seeks ideas and support from residents. It also describes the Abbey and local businesses so it is a source of information for visitors as well.

Your involvement is important!

We really need your help. As the project develops, we want to hear a wide range of thoughts and ideas about how the church can be used in the future for the benefit of the village. Why is it special and important to you? How do you envisage the Abbey can be used in the future and what would help to enhance it as a sacred and community space? We would particularly like to hear of any inspiring examples elsewhere you have come across.

<https://blanchland.org/blanchland-project/>, invitation for volunteers to take part

There is a section on the website which is intended as a community forum for project volunteers, but in practice the new Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/BlanchlandAbbey/>, Blanchland Community Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BlanchlandCommunity/> (set up by the Blanchland Abbey Project) and WhatsApp group are used more for people to communicate about the project.

Partnership work with Lord Crewe's Charity and other local organisations for the care of the church and village

The relationship between the Lord Crewe's Charity and the Abbey is being strengthened. The Charity's Agent attended the Abbey Alive! day and was very impressed by the scale of the event and the proposals put forward for developments in the Abbey. The Abbey and the Charity are in discussion about installing ground source heating in the Abbey. The Archdeacon of Newcastle Diocese is now a Trustee of the Lord Crewe's Charity which may help to further strengthen the relationship between the Abbey, the Charity and the village.

The Lord Crewe Arms hotel in Blanchland is very supportive of the Blanchland Abbey Project and is keen to work with the Abbey. The Deputy Events Co-ordinator is one of the project volunteers and is also involved in the 4As project. Shared events can be held either in the Abbey or in the hotel, depending on the type of event, for example the hotel's wedding fair being linked to the Abbey.

The White Monk Tea Room and Felons Bar have hosted events for the Blanchland Abbey Project.

The project has received advice and support from the North Pennines AONB Sustainable Tourism Officer.

Blanchland Abbey is involved in Newcastle Diocese's Rural Churches for Everyone project (<https://www.newcastle.anglican.org/rural-churches-for-everyone/>)³. This will provide support, advice and skills training to groups of churches to help give them a more sustainable future.

Blanchland Abbey will be more resilient

The project team all consider that the Abbey has a more resilient future as a result of this project. All the activities carried out so far have enabled them to develop the 4As project and apply for grant funding for it, which will enable the alterations to be made to the Abbey to make it a more useable space for worship and other activities. The architectural, archaeological and archives research along with the heritage interpretation training will enable the team to provide an enhanced visitor experience which will encourage more and repeat visits, which in turn is likely to bring more trade to the businesses in the village.

This is all underpinned by a larger number of volunteers who are keen to work with the Abbey as a place of worship and as a heritage and cultural venue.

8. The process of achieving the outcomes

Project programme

The resignation in July 2019, due to personal circumstances, of the first project manager and the time required to appoint the second project manager who started in September meant that there was a delay in the delivery of the project. The National Lottery Heritage Fund granted a two month extension to allow for this, which enabled all the strands of the project to be delivered.

"The change in project manager well into the project inevitably caused a bit of a break in progress and impetus. However, it has turned out well in the end as Yvonne got up to speed quickly and has been effective at coordinating the various aspects of the project and running project meetings." (Volunteer survey response)

"How the outcomes have been achieved and how the project has progressed has depended a great deal on the project managers and the enthusiasm of the volunteers. There have been times when the pace slackened and momentum slowed and the change in project managers was a clear instance of this, but we

³ Rural Churches for Everyone will work with 42 rural churches across the Diocese during 2019-2021 to collectively plan for a sustainable future for the church buildings, their communities and their heritage. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

stuck well to targets and, which in retrospect were mostly realistic, and in practice achievable – as we have demonstrated.” (Chair of Steering Group)

Commissioning consultants and specialist advice

The architects who had carried out the quinquennial survey on the Abbey were initially appointed to make recommendations for re-ordering the nave and north transept to improve the worship space, and for new access, kitchen and toilet facilities. However, the original project budget had not allowed for the surveying costs which would be required, so the costs were reviewed and there was a tendering process to appoint new architects who could carry out the necessary work within the revised budget. Doonan Architects Ltd were appointed to carry out this work, with the added benefit that the project architect, Tristan Spicer, is one of the Diocesan Advisory Committee architects.

In the original grant application, there had not been a budget for the digital surveys of the building or for the geophysics research, both of which were essential given that the Abbey is a Grade 1 listed building with complex structures both above and below ground. The Heritage Management Plan was to have been written by the Inspired North East Project Officer but as he moved on to another job, an independent consultant had to be commissioned to produce the plan which incurred a higher cost. These budget changes were all agreed with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, but it would have been better if more specialist advice had been obtained whilst the original grant application was being prepared.

The grant application had also underestimated the amount of professional and volunteer time which would be required to deliver all the elements of the project. The Project Manager role was allocated 40 days, whereas it has required 55 days. Managing a community project of this nature takes a great deal of time, more so than managing a similar project as an employee within an organisation. The day rate for the Project Manager was £250, which is a relatively low rate for work of this nature; £350 to £400 would have been more realistic given the skills required for this role and the costs which self-employed consultants need to cover themselves (business insurance, pension, equipment etc).

9. Lessons learned and recommendations for future resilience for Blanchland Abbey

“We are well-placed to move the project forward. We have real sense of purpose in at least three of our main areas: welcome/tourism, sacred space and the use of the building for the arts and the educational potential has begun to be fleshed out too. We have a clearly enhanced understanding of the abbey – church and village and of its heritage significance. We have a realistic plan for

governance and of the capital project that will eventually be presented. Most importantly we have recognised the steps needed to provide a sustainable future for the abbey. We have a new sense of purpose, backed up by appropriate skills in heritage interpretation and management, governance, finance and communications.” (Chair, Steering Group)

“It's clear that many local people and businesses really care about the Abbey and its future. By bringing these people together the project has shown that a future project would be enthusiastically supported. The involvement of experts (e.g. archaeologists, historic building experts) has been important in communicating the Abbey's unique heritage and special features (many of which we as residents were previously unaware of). This knowledge has shaped the way the project has evolved and should continue in any future project. Visiting other places and sharing ideas has also been really useful, showing that it's important to learn from projects elsewhere.” (Volunteer survey response)

Project Manager

It would not have been possible to run the Blanchland Abbey Project without a project manager, to bring capacity and skills to the steering group. Managing a community project of this type involves a lot of time for the project manager, and sufficient time, at an appropriate day rate, should be allowed in future project planning. Managing a project of this nature, particularly with a strong community focus, requires a wide range of skills and experience which should be considered when writing the job description and selecting a consultant. There should be contingency planning in place in case the project manager needs to step down from the role for any reason.

Commissioning consultants and specialist advice

When planning a new project, specialist advice should be sought at an early stage about the types of consultancy and advice required. For example, it would have been better if the geophysical surveys and digital surveys of the abbey had been included in the original budget.

“Ask for help, plan more in depth e.g. we did not originally plan for geophysics but this has thrown up archaeology of great interest and could change how we do our heating.” (Volunteer survey response)

Involving volunteers and other organisations in the community

The Steering Group have been very pleased with the number of volunteers who have taken part in the project and who are keen to continue to be involved – many more than originally anticipated. This momentum should be continued by creating opportunities for existing volunteers and new ones, not only as part of the 4As project but within the daily life of the Abbey as well.

"Involve people early, work to people's strengths, listen to ideas and be open to suggestions." (Volunteer survey response)

The input from other organisations in Blanchland, such as the Lord Crewe Arms hotel, the White Monk Tea Room and the Lord Crewe's Charity has also been very encouraging and this should be built on as part of the 4As project and in other aspects of the Abbey's activities.

"Blanchland had been a dying village. Now it's not the same as it has been – as a community, if we back each other we can go forward again and have a great community." (Steering group member)

Some of the volunteers are continuing to develop ideas of how to integrate heritage into sustainable development for the village as a whole.

New governance structure

The advice from the Northumberland County Council Social Enterprise Team was very beneficial for the steering group to consider what type of organisation would be best for the future management of the Abbey, which would also involve the local community. Further legal advice on setting up a Charitable Incorporated Organisation is being sought.

The amount of interest and commitment shown by volunteers, local businesses and the Lord Crewe's Charity has shown that a new governance structure, where the Abbey is owned partly by the community as well as by the PCC, will be an effective way to ensure a resilient future for the Abbey.

As the Archdeacon is now a trustee of the Lord Crewe's Charity, this may help to strengthen the link between the Abbey and the Charity.

"The Four As of Blanchland: acoustics, archaeology and audiences, in an Abbey"

This forthcoming project has come out of the Resilient Heritage project and will further strengthen the Abbey's future. The 4As project will have better-planned outcomes commensurate with the responsibility of managing a Grade 1 listed building.

*"Without the Resilient Heritage project, the 4As project would be done **to** the community, not **by** the community." (Steering group member)*

Because of the advice and support given by the consultants and other organisations during the course of the Blanchland Abbey Project, the steering group have access to further advice from them in the future, even if the 4As project does not go ahead for any reason.

Use existing guidance when planning and delivering a future project

There is a wealth of guidance online from previous projects in the region and elsewhere in the UK. The Rural Churches for Everyone project is drawing together these resources into a single reference location so that communities can access them more easily. These will be a valuable source which can be used to make the project easier to run and more effective.

Appendix 1: Logic Model

Approved Purposes	Outputs	Outcomes	Longer term impacts
The appointment of a consultant Project Manager (40 days work during the project)	Project Manager Toni Bush appointed February 2019, succeeded by Yvonne Conchie, September 2019	Project Manager brought additional skills and capacity to the project team. Project Manager managed the project delivery in conjunction with the PCC and BCDO	Project completed successfully, providing basis for future project development and grant applications
Recruitment of 36 volunteers from the local community	39 volunteers recruited. Took part in strands of project delivery: Community engagement History and archaeology Tourism and visitors Blanchland Abbey governance Organising Abbey Alive! consultation day	New people became involved in the project and the life of the Abbey More people available to deliver / take part in the project activities	Committed team of people will continue to be involved in developments at the Abbey and in the village
Delivery of training for staff and volunteers in: conservation management, heritage interpretation, ICT, communications, fundraising, finance and governance	Project team and volunteers took part in training sessions: Conservation management Heritage interpretation Archaeology excavation and surveying Website development and digital communications Fundraising Finance Governance	Project team and volunteers learn and develop essential skills for the management and interpretation of the Abbey and village, and communication with local residents and tourists. Finance, governance and fundraising training provide future resilience for the organisation	The future management team have the skills and knowledge to maintain the Abbey and interpret it and the wider village to visitors. Options are chosen for the best form of future governance. Skills in financial management and fundraising used to increase the Abbey's income.
Visits, for representatives of the management group and volunteers, to six heritage villages across the UK to look at good practice in terms of their offer and management	Group visits to 13 villages and churches in the North East and the Midlands, plus the Steering Group Chair visited a further 2 churches in Gloucestershire, and St Aidan's Bamburgh (Northumberland)	Project team and volunteers gained an understanding of what makes a church welcoming and well-interpreted for visitors, and lessons which can be applied to the Abbey. Also an understanding of how other historic estate villages are presented to visitors.	Ideas which can be implemented in the Abbey and in Blanchland, making the connection between the church and the village. Will form the basis of future project developments and fundraising bids.

Approved Purposes	Outputs	Outcomes	Longer term impacts
Consultation with stakeholders and partners to inform plans for the future extended use of the Abbey Church and its heritage. This will look at four areas of common interest in its use: as a sacred space, as a tourist venue, as a venue for the arts and as an educational resource.	2 consultation events with local residents: April and November Consultation meetings with stakeholder organisations	Local residents have been able to have their say in proposed developments Residents and visitors have commented on options for improved access and new facilities in Abbey	Chosen options will form basis of future development plans and funding bids so that the Abbey can be a successful sacred space, tourist venue, venue for the arts and an educational resource.
Research into and production of a detailed report on the tourism potential for Blanchland	Tourism development report produced by Andrew Duff, tourism consultant	Tourism report forms basis of planning an improved offer for visitors and identifies target groups of potential visitors	More visitors encouraged to visit the Abbey and village, leading to increased income for Abbey and local businesses
Production of a Heritage Management Plan for Blanchland Abbey	Heritage Management and Conservation Plan produced by Dr Robert Young, archaeology and historic building consultant	Heritage Management and Conservation Plan enables management team to care for the Abbey effectively in the future	The Abbey will be maintained in good condition and any alterations will be carried out sensitively with regard to the historic fabric
Evaluation of options and production of a strategy for the future use and development of the church	Digital surveys of Abbey completed. Doonan Architects created options for improved access and kitchen and toilet facilities in the Abbey. Visits to other churches and villages, and consultation with stakeholders, has produced options for using the Abbey as a sacred space, as a tourist venue, as a venue for the arts and as an educational resource. Geophysics survey carried out to determine location of structures underground, which would have impact on any	Options have been reviewed at Abbey Alive! Consultation day and the most appropriate ones chosen by the project management team. Geophysics survey and archaeology excavations have located underground structures so that any extension of underfloor / ground source heating can be installed without damaging the Abbey.	Chosen options will form basis of future development plans and funding bids so that the Abbey can be a successful sacred space, tourist venue, venue for the arts and an educational resource.

	extension to the Abbey (for kitchen and toilet option) and for underfloor / ground source heating		
Approved Purposes	Outputs	Outcomes	Longer term impacts
Development of a funding strategy for the 'Future Blanchland' heritage regeneration scheme	Following the geophysics and archaeological research results, the strategy is to undertake further research from invasive archaeological surveys, acoustic work, additional audience development work (around a village atlas) and enterprise stimulation. Termed the Four As of Blanchland: Archaeology, Acoustics, Audiences in an Abbey. Currently at EOI stage with NLHF.	Sufficient information in place to submit a grant application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to carry out further investigations, so that the most appropriate works are carried out at the Abbey, along with audience development work with local residents and visitors	The Abbey's fabric and surroundings will be better understood so that future building work can be carried out appropriately. This will enable the Abbey to become a more effective community resource for Blanchland residents and visitors.
Exploration, development and implementation of a new governance model for the future management of the site and associated projects	Strategy planning day facilitated by Northumberland County Council Social Enterprise team, advising on vision for new governance model. Further work is necessary to determine which of several models will be acceptable to Newcastle Diocese, whilst increasing buy in from residents and the Lord Crewe Charity trustees.	Project team able to make a well-informed decision about what would be the best form of governance and type of organisation to set up to manage the Abbey effectively in the future	A more resilient governance structure and organisation to ensure a sustainable future for the Abbey.
Development of a Communications Plan and website improvements	Website https://blanchland.org/ has been improved and includes information about the Blanchland Abbey Project. Informal and organic communications plan implemented with Instagram and Facebook pages and a Facebook community group. Lord Crewe Arms Hotel has been supportive with event marketing.	Communications will continue after the project closes, around the progress of Four As project.	Communication will continue to reach local residents and visitors to encourage them to visit and be involved in the Abbey, and to benefit Blanchland as a whole.

	Communications will continue after the project closes around the progress of Four As project.		
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Appendix 2: Survey responses for options for re-ordering the Abbey

Nave and Altar

Nave Option A Comments

- i. I prefer keeping the timber screen behind the altar as a storage solution. Not particularly keen to keep the rood screen.
- ii. I think moving the organ is a brilliant idea as no-one would be able to see the beautiful windows otherwise!
The altar would be better left where it is in my opinion, unless the space behind is for storage
- iii. Altar should not be moved
- iv. I like it as it is why are these proposals being considered? The font needs to be near the main entrance!
- v. The font should be up front by the altar. The screens hide all the beautiful stone
- vi. Better connection between the altar and the pews where ordinary people sit. Baptisms would still need people to turn around.
- vii. good to remove the organ and reveal the window
- viii. Yes quite like this option.
- ix. Agree. Moveable pews. What type/style? - must ensure they fit in surroundings.

Nave Option B Comments

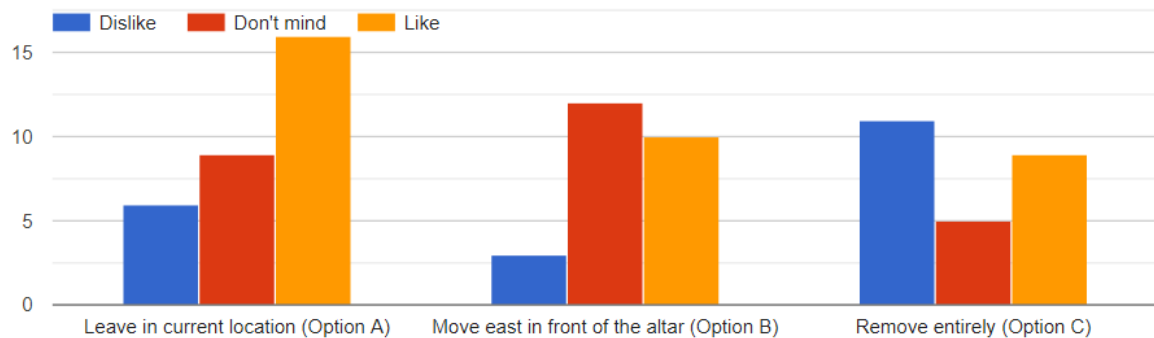
- i. The storage cupboard will detract from the west windows. I don't like this position for the rood screen.
- ii. I think that the timber screens should be kept as they are very pretty and look quite useful. The secret heating system would prove very useful during the winter though!
- iii. Altar should not be moved
- iv. I like it as it is why are these proposals being considered? The font needs to be near the main entrance!
- v. this looks like a good option with a more useful layout
- vi. useful to have storage cupboard - particularly re-using salvaged panelling
- vii. The best options. Font and altar at front, Rood Screen retained at the front and beautiful surround for weddings and christenings.
- viii. More intimate than now, especially for small services. The Rood Screen is undeniably beautiful but I prefer there to be no divide.
- ix. as above with organ
- x. pews too far from the altar
- xi. No to storage beneath west window. Option A would have storage behind altar hidden by a short screen.

Nave Option C Comments

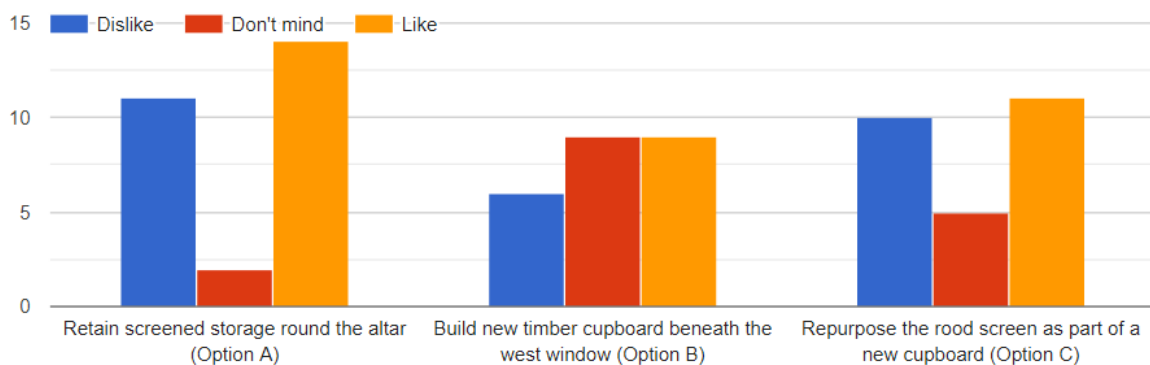
- i. I think that the choir stalls are quite important, but moveable pews look more useful, and they can still be used by the choir!

- ii. Altar should not be moved
- iii. I like it as it is why are these proposals being considered? The font needs to be near the main entrance!
- iv. I much prefer this option. Exposing the original stone and removing the Victorian timber
- v. The open plan is good - all the lovely stone work revealed. But the screen is a bit lost at the back
- vi. My favourite option - the rood screen can still be enjoyed but I think it would be better enjoyed in the large arch [between the nave and the north transept]
- vii. I like this idea best. Rood screen is beautiful but using elsewhere and opening up the front is better for view
- viii. do not like this option as too radical
- ix. I like this option, although I did think moving the altar to other side of the church would have been more beneficial for larger weddings etc.
- x. Prefer A. Font nearer pulpit.
- xi. No 'cos there is no separation for the secular use of the church i.e. nave and the sanctuary

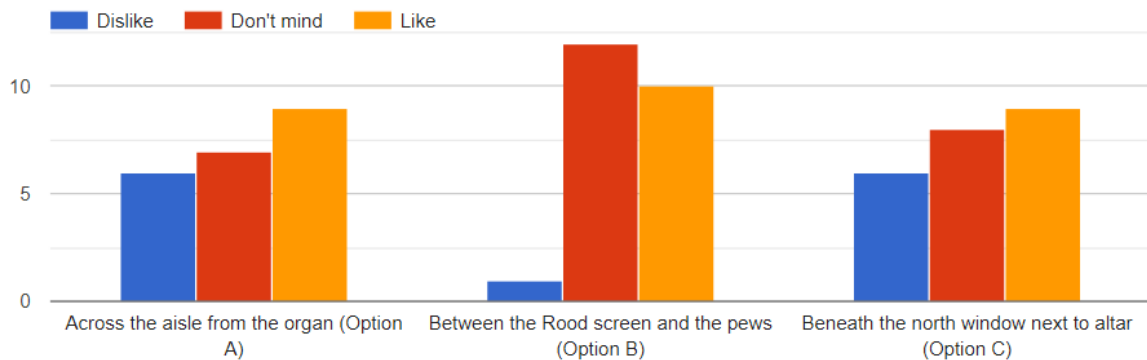
3. Which options do you prefer for the Rood screen?



4. Which options do you prefer for storage?



5. Which options do you prefer for the font location?



Tower & Side Chapel Comments

Tower Option A Comments – large lobby, kitchen servery

- i. The toilet hides the stonework of the north wall which has just been left uncluttered to good effect. A toilet in this location is too exposed and people might find this a problem. A kitchen in a cupboard is not attractive.
- ii. I think that if a defined meeting area is created, then there should be a bit more privacy, so to close the arches a bit more.
- iii. For A, B and D I don't like the disabled WC in the position shown
- iv. Looks too modern& the kitchen looks out of place
- v. Yes, I like the servery but I think the heritage area should be somewhere to sit with your refreshments
- vi. preferred option as minimal change
- vii. Options A and B do not adequately address the future needs and use of the Abbey

Tower Option B Comments large lobby, kitchen in a box room

- i. A roofed lobby the whole width of the tower will detract from the impressive height of the interior of the tower. The same arguments against the toilet. Putting the kitchen in the side chapel reduces the space for other activities.
- ii. The heritage display is important, and 1 toilet may be enough, as there are many public toilets nearby.
- iii. I like this option too - the kitchen will create a nice buzz as people come in
- iv. most flexible option

Tower Option C Comments – small porch, extension, structural glass

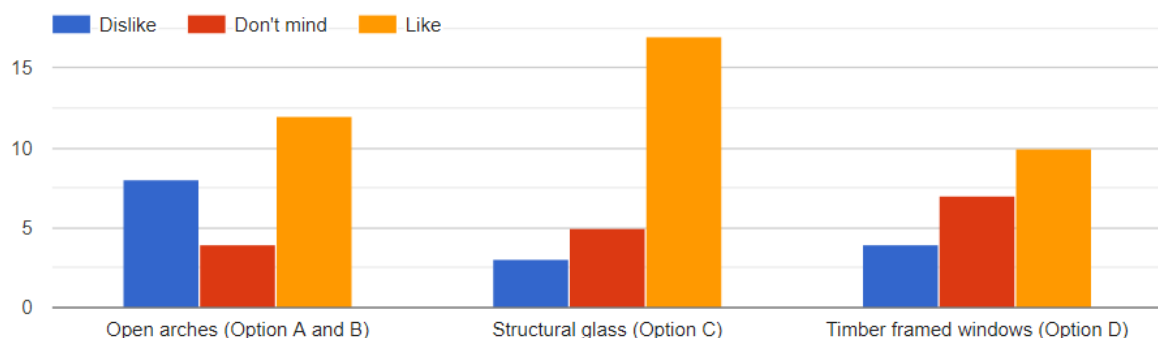
- i. This is much better. I like the area being jointly for heritage and meetings. The extension with kitchen and toilet is much more practical.
- ii. Preferred option. The disabled loo not being in the lobby both for users and people using the lobby
- iii. Prefer this option, but use the tower space as initial welcome/information area
- iv. taking toilets to the rear is in my opinion best position for loos

- v. about the best practically and aesthetically
- vi. kitchen not obvious (small) doesn't take away from aesthetics of the building. Love the glass meeting area.
- vii. I think it looks smart but I don't know what the demand would be for a meeting room. It would be sad for it not to be used
- viii. Do not like the idea of new extension
- ix. Yes very much in favour of this option
- x. I like this best with small kitchen. I would like the Abbey to look as it is mainly so practical and information areas not in main church.
- xi. I like this option. Small kitchen and one toilet
- xii. This has merit but appears to be the most costly option
- xiii. Preferred. Meeting area and heritage display needed. External porch would be too much.

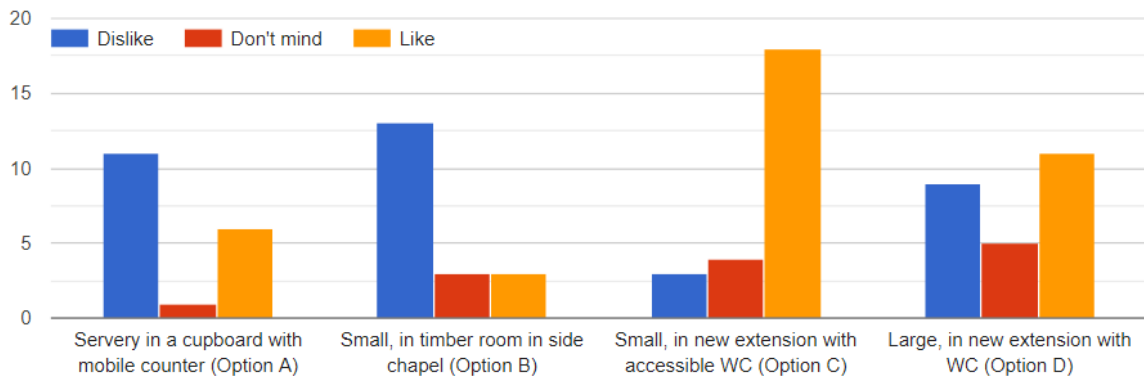
Tower Option D Comments – large lobby, extension, timber windows

- i. I don't mind the timber framed windows, but in other respects I dislike this because of the roofed lobby and toilet. They will spoil the effect of the entrance.
- ii. I don't think anything should be added onto the church too much
- iii. large kitchen and a second toilet makes the most sense
- iv. Good option again. Kitchen tucked away. But prefer the full glass to the timber as it looks more open.
- v. As above. I prefer contemporary structural glass and the contrast it provides. Not more clunky timber
- vi. Don't mind this option but would prefer to see the toilet in the extension and smaller kitchen
- vii. Only need one toilet in timber building.
- viii. Keep Abbey as it is.
- ix. This seems to be the option with the most potential for longevity
- x. No. Heritage displays in side chapel area. Grave covers moving to west wall.

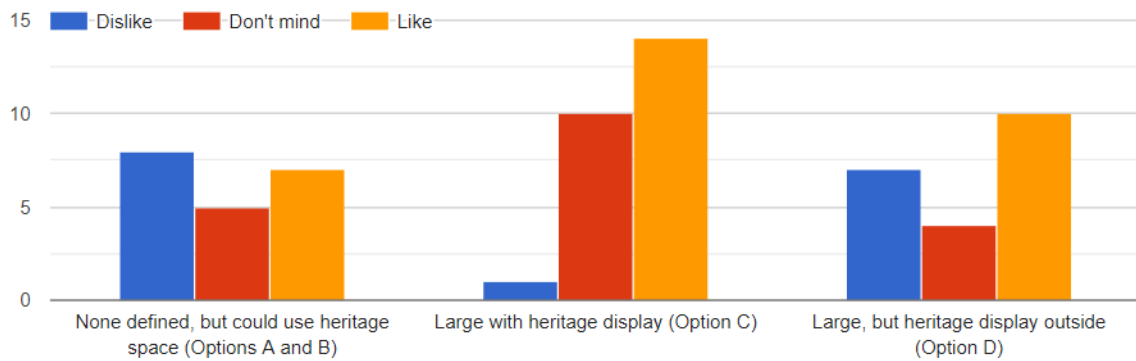
7. Which options do you prefer for the Side Chapel Arches?



8. Which options do you prefer for the Kitchen?



9. Which options do you prefer for the Meeting Space?



10. Which options do you prefer for the Tower lobby?

