

THE FUTURE OF LISMORE CHURCH: CONSULTATION SUMMARY

The consultation process comprised three parts:

1. Questionnaire survey (hosted on the SmartSurvey platform) Nov – Dec 2022 : 99 respondents answered 12 questions

The survey was open to both residents and non-residents.

Most people who responded felt that the church was important to them, despite not being regular attendees. Reasons given were nationally significant history, heritage and archaeology; cultural importance and island identity; family connections; regular worship, spiritual connections, reflection and contemplation; life events / rites of passage and annual events (Christmas etc) - and an island feature for visitors.

Respondents indicated in favour of the community taking ownership of the church. Out of 93 responses to this question, 72 people were in favour and 12 people were in favour with caveats, i.e. provided it was likely to be financially sustainable; it didn't rely on volunteers ; it didn't detract from existing facilities/ businesses and that there was agreement on the island.

Most people wanted worship to continue in the church but it could be available to all denominations to use. Additional uses were accepted but the majority would only be happy with some of the pews being removed – with some left for worshippers.

More than 11 different ideas on potential future uses were suggested for the church; 10 ideas were suggested for the church house (wee manse) and 10 ideas for the glebe land. These ideas were collated where there were obvious similarities and presented for discussion and consideration at the drop in session.

The report on the questionnaire survey has been circulated previously.

2. Drop-in workshop – 28th January 2023: 52 people participated

The drop-in session presented:

- Introduction, context and indicative map of the church, manse and glebe land (information)
- Summary results from the questionnaire survey (information)
- Ideas suggested through the questionnaire survey – with an opportunity to add any further ideas
- SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) relating to the possibility of the community taking ownership of the church and related assets. Participants could offer SWOT comments on any specific ideas also.
- Key parameters – things we need to take into account when considering different ideas / options
- Indicating preferences for collated ideas

Participants were invited to indicate their top three preferences by placing coloured dots against each idea. The ideas that received most preferences were:

Church: Life Events – weddings, funerals etc- incl. destination wedding venue (37 votes);
Interpretation and exhibition – in association with heritage centre on ancient history; St Moluag;

ecclesiastical history etc (23 votes); Performance space (19 votes); Quiet space – contemplation, meditation, sanctuary, retreat (10 votes).

Church house: Accommodation for church events (27 votes); Long term let (21 votes); Support (back office / catering etc) function for church (18 votes).

Glebe land: Historical – archaeological interpretation and further excavation (36 votes); Burial plots / area for scattering ashes/ garden of remembrance (33 votes); Farming (19 votes).

The outputs from the drop-in session have been circulated separately.

3. Workshop event – 18th February 2023: 24 participants (15 apologies)

Participants split into four groups to discuss the top four ideas for the Church and the top three ideas each for the church house and glebe land that were indicated as a preference at the drop-in session on 28th January (these ideas were also frequently suggested in the questionnaire survey).

Participants were invited to discuss the pros and cons of each idea and their compatibility with the other ideas and to offer comments. Followed by a plenary session – discussion and conclusions.

There was consensus in the meeting that most of the uses discussed were compatible.

It was agreed that the package of uses overall needs to be revenue generating and financially sustainable, although some elements may contribute more income than others. The idea of a commercial aspect to a venture was supported – for example, with a community interest company or trading arm working with local businesses and helping to set up new businesses. It was noted that community ownership would bring considerable capital and revenue cost burdens that need to be identified clearly.

Whatever happens in the church, a multi-use space was supported but it was felt that some pews should be retained or at least – not all to be removed. Investigation of whether pews could be placed on castors for greater flexibility could be explored.

Restoration work to the church building might bring opportunities to offer training and apprenticeships to young people in traditional building skills and crafts.

A note of caution was expressed about the possibility that maximising the utilisation of the Church may well divert activities from Lismore Public Hall.

The church house could be offered as a long let in the short-medium term until the proposed uses of the church building are up and running. However, in the long term it may be integral to whatever happens in the church and its use should support the church in a way that contributes most revenue to the project.

The glebe was also seen as suitable for multiple uses – continued archaeology with interpretation for visitors; a garden of remembrance with plots for scattering ashes, which could generate significant income if managed well; and farming, which could take place across part of the site – with potential for demonstration and exhibition of traditional farming techniques.

The opportunity to develop a solar array was discussed briefly and it was agreed that this option should be investigated further. It would be compatible with other uses, including sheep grazing.