

# Over 600 Voices: The Birnam Arts Community Consultation Report 2025

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**1**

# **Executive Summary**



# Executive Summary

**Birnam Arts has reached an important moment in its development. Over the autumn of 2025, we carried out the most wide-ranging consultation in recent years to listen carefully to the community, staff, volunteers, visitors and Board. More than 600 contributions were gathered through surveys, post-its, group discussions and creative workshops. Together, they paint a clear and consistent picture: Birnam Arts is deeply valued, but people want and expect more. They want an organisation that feels confident, creative, welcoming and sustainable, and they want to help shape what comes next. This report brings those voices together to show what matters most to people and what this means for Birnam Arts' future direction.**

This report summarises the findings from the Birnam Arts community consultation undertaken from 15 October to 17 November 2025. The consultation aimed to understand how people currently use Birnam Arts, what they value, and how the organisation might evolve to better meet local needs.

Engagement activities included an online survey, the “Birnam Oak” post-it wall, Creative Scotland reflection boards, and facilitated sessions with staff, the Board and families.

The survey, completed by 212 respondents, provides a structured picture of visiting

patterns, levels of importance, and preferences relating to the café, shop, programme and potential membership scheme. The post-its and reflection boards add a qualitative layer, offering spontaneous insights into visitor experiences, emotions and ideas. The staff and Board sessions provide an internal perspective on operational challenges, organisational culture and aspirations for the future.

Across all methods, the same themes appear: people value Birnam Arts for its welcome, its sense of community and its creative spirit; they want more activity and greater vibrancy;

they want clearer communication; and they want the organisation to rediscover confidence and clarity of purpose. Staff and Board feedback also highlights the need for stronger internal systems, better alignment and improved leadership support.

The report presents what people told us, explains why these views matter, and outlines the key areas Birnam Arts may wish to consider as it looks to strengthen its foundations and shape a future that is creative, sustainable and firmly rooted in community needs.

# Key Themes



## **Birnam Arts is deeply valued by the community**

Seen as warm, welcoming and important to everyday life

Provides emotional benefits: calm, connection, joy, inspiration

Considered a rare and essential community asset in Highland Perthshire



## **Strong appetite for more creativity, activity and cultural vibrancy**

Requests for more workshops, exhibitions, live music and family events

Desire for a year-round, clearly communicated programme

People want the building to feel more lively, creative and “alive” again



## **Café experience is central – and in need of renewal**

Café is highly valued as a social and family hub

Clear demand for homemade food, variety and a more distinctive offer

Opening hours are a major pain point, especially for families and event-goers

People want a café that feels aligned with the arts centre’s identity



## **The shop has potential but lacks a clear identity**

Appreciated for local crafts and cards

Desire for a more curated, arts-connected, higher-quality range

Opportunities to better link retail to exhibitions and children’s programming



## **Communication and visibility need to improve**

People often do not know what is on or discover events too late

Clearer, more proactive communication needed across all channels

Strong desire for a prominent in-building “What’s On” presence



## **Staff are committed but feel stretched and under-supported**

Staff describe pride in their work but also strain, unclear roles and reduced creativity

Need for clearer leadership, stronger communication and stable systems

Volunteers require clearer structure, support and coordination



## **Community openness to a Friends / Membership scheme**

Many would join at ~£5/month if benefits are clear and meaningful

No resistance in principle — people want to support sustainability

Transparency and purpose of funds will be important

# 2

## Introduction

A comprehensive consultation revealing what matters most to our community, staff and stakeholders.



# Introduction

**Between October and November 2025, Birnam Arts undertook one of its most wide-ranging community conversations to date. This period of listening and reflection came at a pivotal moment for the organisation, as it faced financial pressure, operational transition, and the need to chart a sustainable and imaginative path for the future. The Board agreed that any meaningful change should be rooted in a deep understanding of what Birnam Arts means to the people who use it — whether daily, occasionally, or in passing — and in what they hope it might become.**

The consultation set out to gather more than opinions. It aimed to create a shared story: a picture of belonging, creativity, value, and aspiration. Birnam Arts is both a cultural centre and a community anchor, and the process recognised that decisions about its future must be guided not only by financial considerations but by lived experience.

Over the course of a month, contributions were invited through multiple channels. A structured online survey captured quantitative data and comparative insights. In contrast, a large “Birnam Oak Tree” installation in the café invited spontaneous reflections and quickly grew into a vibrant forest of colour and ideas, gathering post-its from children, families, regular visitors, artists, older residents, and tourists.

Running alongside this, a series of Creative

Scotland-themed boards invited reflection on wellbeing, community connection, artistic development, and cultural experience. These added a further contributions, offering insight into how Birnam Arts supports people emotionally, socially, and artistically. Although not used for Creative Scotland reporting, they provided valuable texture to the consultation.

To deepen organisational insight, three facilitated sessions were also held with key internal and user groups: the Board, the staff team, and parents and carers attending Book Bugs. These sessions were not part of the public consultation but are included in this report for completeness and for the richness of understanding they bring. The Board participated in an energetic “Crazy 8s” creative futures session; staff took part in a candid lived-experience conversation about recent

changes; and the Book Bugs group reflected on family belonging, everyday use of the centre, and hopes for the future.

Together, these layers of engagement form a vivid picture of Birnam Arts at a moment of transition — a place full of affection, creativity, frustration, pride, concern, imagination, and hope. This report brings those voices together to inform decision-making and support the ongoing Operating Model Review. It is presented as a narrative of what people feel, how they use the space, what they value most, and what they wish would evolve to ensure Birnam Arts remains a vital cultural and community presence for the next generation.

# 3

## Methodology

Listening to over 600 voices to understand what Birnam Arts means to its community and how it can thrive for the next generation.



# Methodology

The consultation was intentionally designed to be inclusive, wide-reaching, and reflective of the diverse ways in which people interact with Birnam Arts. Recognising that no single method would capture the full range of perspectives, the approach combined structured data collection with informal, creative, and conversational methods to encourage participation from both regular users and occasional visitors.

The online survey, running from 15 October to 17 November 2025, generated 212 completed responses. For a local population of around 3,000 residents across Dunkeld and Birnam, this represents approximately 7% of the community. Taken in isolation, this would be below the threshold normally required for statistical certainty in formal population sampling. However, Birnam Arts is used by a subset of the local population rather than every resident, and it also attracts users from surrounding villages and visitors from further afield. In this context, the response level is strong. More importantly, the survey forms only one part of a much richer dataset.

Alongside the survey, Birnam Arts installed the Birnam Oak Tree consultation wall in the café — a deliberately low-barrier invitation for anyone visiting the building to leave reflections or ideas. This approach proved

highly effective in accessing voices who may not complete a formal survey: families with young children, older people, teenagers, café regulars, workshop participants, tourists, and first-time visitors. Over the consultation period, the tree collected 338 individual post-its, offering spontaneous, immediate insight into how people feel about the space, what they value, and what they hope to see in the future.

A further 55 post-its were gathered through the Creative Scotland-themed reflection boards, which asked people to consider wellbeing, community connection, artistic development, and cultural experience. These contributions deepened understanding of the emotional and creative impact Birnam Arts has on those who use it. Although these insights are not being used for Creative Scotland reporting, they are included here for completeness and for the quality of reflection they offered.

Taken together, the consultation produced 605 contributions through surveys and post-its. While not statistically representative of the entire population, this combined dataset is qualitatively robust. It captures a broad cross-section of the people who actively use Birnam Arts during the consultation period, providing insight into the views of those most invested in — and affected by — the organisation's

future direction. The convergence of themes across multiple methods further strengthens confidence in the findings.

To complement this public engagement, three facilitated sessions were held with key internal and user groups:

- a Board Creative Futures workshop,
- a Staff and Volunteer Manager lived-experience session, and
- a Book Bugs parent/carer reflection session.

These conversations were not intended as formal consultation inputs but are included in this report to provide organisational context and to help the Board understand how internal culture, family needs, and community use patterns relate to the wider findings.

Overall, the methodology offers both breadth and depth. The online survey provides structured data; the Oak Tree and reflection boards bring spontaneous, everyday perspectives; and the internal sessions offer deeper contextual insight. Together, they provide a confident, well-rounded foundation for understanding what Birnam Arts means to its community and what changes may be required to ensure a sustainable and vibrant future.

# 4 Online Survey

Strong Support, Honest Feedback:  
What Residents Want From Birnam  
Arts' Future



# Overview

**The community survey formed the first and most structured component of the consultation. Running from 15 October to 17 November 2025, it received 212 completed responses, providing a substantial evidence base from people who actively use Birnam Arts.**

Although this represents approximately 7% of the local Dunkeld and Birnam population, the survey reached a much higher proportion of the centre’s actual users — café customers, library visitors, regular event attendees, families, workshop participants, and community members engaged in activities.

The results show that Birnam Arts is highly valued: a large majority rated it as “important” or “very important” to their lives and the life of the community. Respondents described the centre as a cultural anchor, a welcoming space, and a rare blend of creativity, community, and social connection.

Crucially, the survey highlights how strongly the café, shop, and cultural programme shape people’s overall experience of Birnam Arts. These areas are not viewed as standalone services but as core elements of what makes the centre distinctive. The following sections summarise these findings in detail.



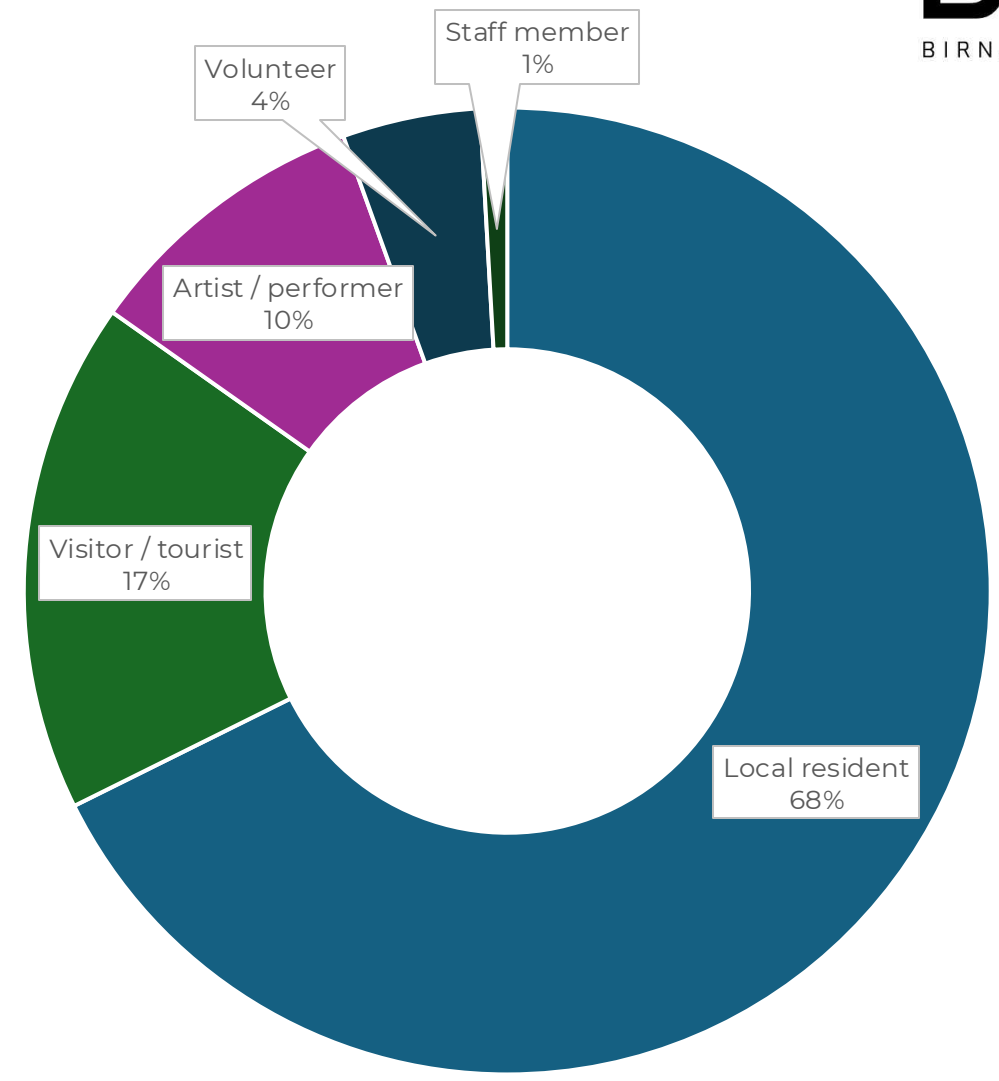
**212**  
Responses



**7%**  
Local  
Population

# Type of Visitor

Almost 70% of all selections identified as Local Residents, with visitors/tourists representing around 17% and artists/performers around 10%. Volunteers and staff made up the remaining small proportion of responses.

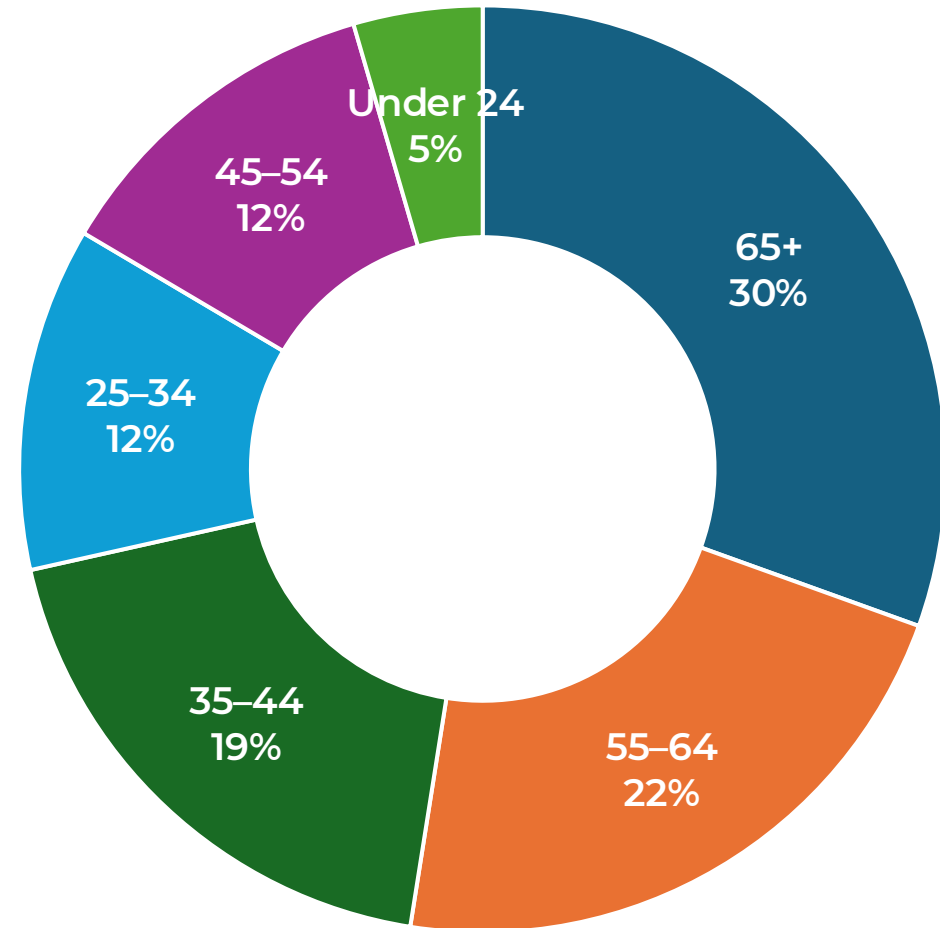


# Age of Respondents

The majority of respondents (52.5%) were aged 55 or over, with the largest single age group being 65+.

A further 31% were aged 25–44, indicating strong engagement from families and working-age adults.

Very few respondents were under 24, suggesting younger voices are less represented in the survey.



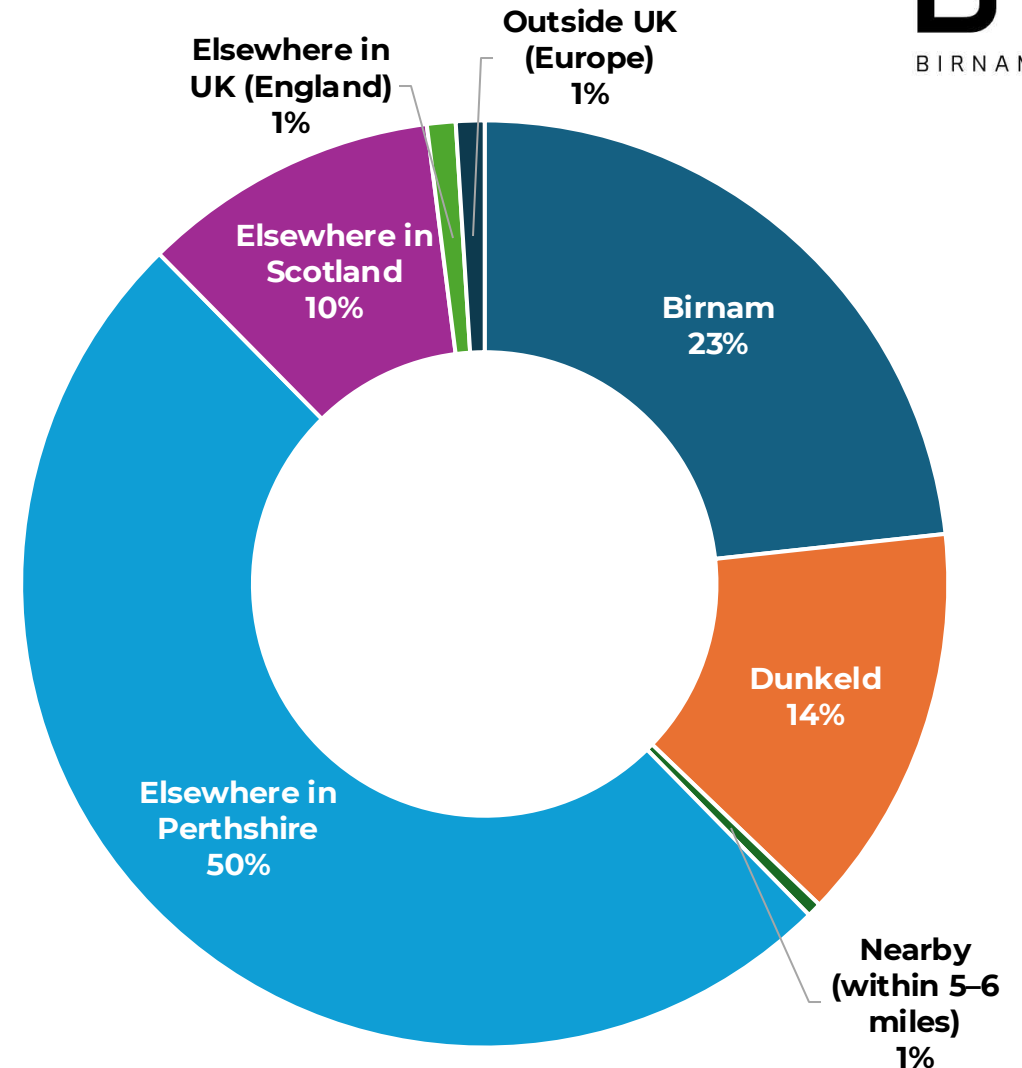
# Location of Respondents

Half of all respondents live elsewhere in Perthshire, while around 37% live in Birnam or Dunkeld.

A further 10% live elsewhere in Scotland, and only a very small number responded from outside Scotland.

This pattern also reflects the time of year in which the survey ran (mid-October to mid-November), when fewer visitors from further afield are typically in the area.

Together, the response profile strongly reinforces that Birnam Arts is viewed as a local and regional asset — not only for Birnam and Dunkeld, but for communities across Perthshire.



# The Café

The café is a **central part of how visitors experience Birnam Arts**. Survey respondents consistently described it as a friendly, welcoming space that encourages people to spend time in the building, meet others, or decompress after an activity. For many, it is an anchor point of the visit.

However, responses also showed clear expectations for improvement.

## What respondents value now

- A bright, comfortable social space
- Friendly staff and a welcoming atmosphere
- A café that feels integral to the building's identity
- A space that works for families, informal meetings, and social catch-ups

## What respondents want to see change

- Many respondents noted that the café's offer has become more limited in recent months. The desire for:
  - a return to homemade food, soups, and fresh options
  - a more creative, distinctive menu

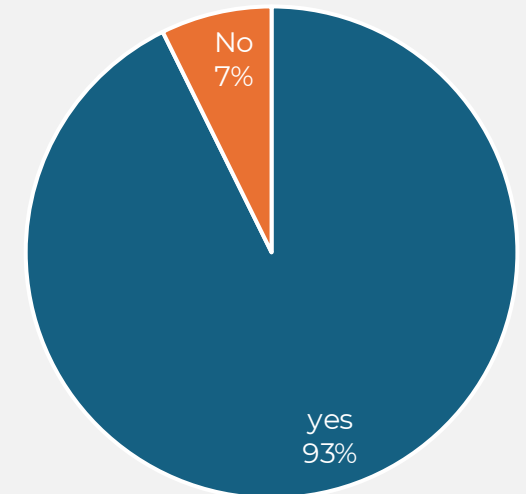
- greater consistency and better value
- a café that feels "alive" and reflective of Birnam Arts' creative character

## Opening hours also emerged as a significant theme:

- Calls for earlier opening in the morning
- Requests for later afternoon opening, particularly children's classes (ballet)
- Frustration that the café is closed during evening events, which respondents view as a missed opportunity

Overall, the café is seen as essential, but respondents want it to feel **more vibrant**, more distinctive, and more **aligned to the identity of the arts centre**.

## Have you visited the café?



The vast majority of respondents (93%) have visited the Birnam Arts café, confirming that it is one of the most widely used parts of the building and a key entry point into the centre. Only around 7% of respondents have not used the café, indicating that café performance has a direct influence on overall community experience and perceptions of Birnam Arts.

# The Café Experience

**Feedback on the café experience presents a mixed but broadly constructive picture. Most respondents rated their experience positively, with the largest proportion scoring the café a 4 out of 5, followed by a meaningful number awarding 3 and 5.**

This suggests that the café is performing reasonably well and is viewed as a valued part of the Birnam Arts offer, but there is still clear space for improvement to lift the overall experience from “good” to “consistently great.”

A smaller cluster of respondents selected 1 or 2, signalling that while dissatisfaction is not widespread, it is present—and important. These lower scores act as early warning indicators that some elements of the café experience are not meeting expectations for particular users. This is consistent with themes already visible in the qualitative feedback elsewhere in the consultation: queues, service speed, menu variety, pricing, and consistency of quality.

The overall ratings pattern—high in the middle, tapering outwards—indicates that the café is not fundamentally failing, but neither is it fully delivering on its potential as a core anchor of the Birnam Arts experience.

For many visitors, especially locals who return regularly, the café is a key reason they use the building at all, meaning even small improvements in quality, clarity of offer, or customer experience could have a disproportionately positive impact on footfall, dwell time, and revenue.

In summary, the café is performing well enough to be appreciated, but not yet well enough to inspire strong advocacy. The data points strongly toward an opportunity: with a more consistent offer, clearer identity, and operational improvements, the café could quickly shift from “satisfactory” to “stand-out,” strengthening both customer satisfaction and the financial sustainability of Birnam Arts.

## How would you rate your experience?



# Café Value & Product Range

**Feedback on the cost and value of the café offer paints a nuanced picture. While the majority of respondents feel the café represents either Good or Excellent value for money, there remains a significant cluster of respondents who perceive the offer as only Fair or, in some cases, Poor.**

This distribution suggests that although the café is broadly appreciated, value for money is emerging as a pressure point and contributes to mixed overall satisfaction. Comments elsewhere in the consultation reinforce this, with several respondents referencing pricing relative to portion size, menu diversity, and consistency of the offer.

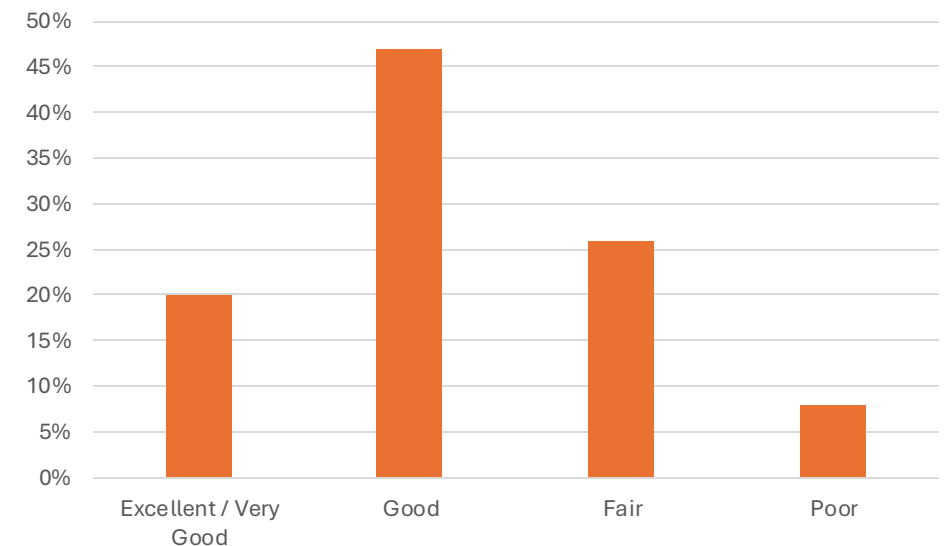
The presence of 26% rating the value as 'Fair' is particularly important. These respondents are signalling that the value proposition is acceptable but not compelling, a risk for customer retention—especially given the local demographic's preference for everyday affordability rather than a premium bistro experience. The 8% rating the café as 'Poor' further indicates that a small but meaningful proportion feel priced out or dissatisfied with the alignment of cost and quality.

Taken together, this feedback suggests the café's pricing structure and product range would benefit from a refreshed approach—one that maintains quality but increases the sense of everyday value, especially during off-peak periods or in response to the cost-of-living context affecting many local users.

## Key Insights

- Two-thirds of respondents feel the café offers good or excellent value, showing a solid foundation to build on.
- One-third dissatisfied.
- Price sensitivity is real especially for families and regular local visitors.
- While quality is appreciated, the cost-quality balance does not feel right for all users.

## Satisfaction with Product Range & Pricing



# How They Feel About Recent Changes

**The café section of the consultation produced one of the richest sets of responses, with both the multiple-choice selections and open comments clearly aligning across a small number of consistent themes. When asked what would encourage them to use the café more, respondents overwhelmingly highlighted four core priorities: greater menu choice, more reliable and extended hours, pre-show dining opportunities, and a stronger family offer. These themes appear repeatedly throughout the comments and are supported by the ranked selection data.**

The most prominent message relates to menu variety and quality. Respondents frequently expressed that the previous offer was more appealing and better aligned to their expectations for a visit to Birnam Arts. Many described the current range as too narrow, too limited, or too reliant on pre-packaged items. Hot food, homemade soups, everyday lunch options, and the ability to order a “proper meal” were repeatedly cited as missing elements. This does not reflect a demand for premium dining — rather, a desire for simple, local, homemade food with warmth and substance, which users remember fondly and associate

strongly with past positive experiences at the centre.

A second theme focused on opening hours and reliability. Many visitors emphasised the importance of having the café open at key times, particularly before and after classes, workshops, and children’s activities when footfall is highest. Unpredictability around opening hours, temporary closures, and reduced kitchen availability were all mentioned as barriers to regular use. Respondents made clear that if the café aligns its availability with the natural busy rhythms of the building, they would visit more often.

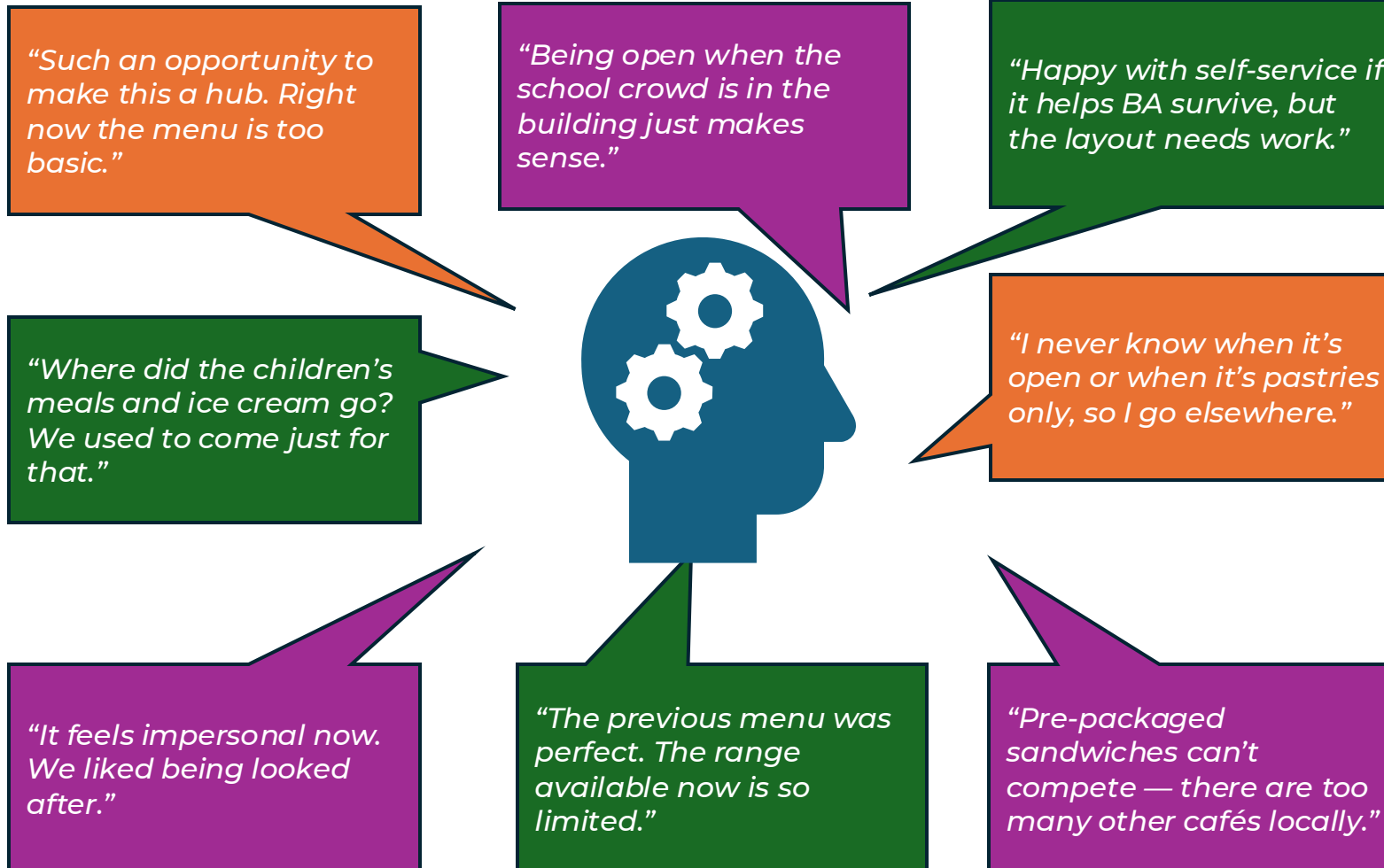
Families represent a particularly important user group for Birnam Arts, and their feedback reflected this. Respondents noted the disappearance of children’s meals, ice cream, and simple family-friendly touches such as colouring sheets or activities. Several participants commented that these offerings were the reason they visited the café in the past. The message is that families want ease, welcome, and reasons to stay longer, and the café plays a crucial role in that experience.

The recent changes to the service model elicited strong reactions. While some respondents understood and accepted the

need for a more sustainable and streamlined approach, many described the current system as less personal and, in some cases, potentially unsafe for customers carrying hot food through a busy space. Comments were not universally negative — several respondents said the self-service model is common and acceptable — but even these positive views were conditional on the space being better organised, more clearly laid out, and easier to navigate. What people want most is a sense of care, welcome, and personal connection, which they feel has diminished.

Across all themes, a broader message emerges: the café is not just a food outlet — it is part of the Birnam Arts experience. People want the café to feel aligned with the ethos of the organisation: warm, distinctive, community-rooted, and creative. When the café feels generic, impersonal, or reduced in scope, this affects how people feel about the centre as a whole. The feedback suggests that the café has strong potential to be a genuine hub — a place people choose to come, meet, linger, and return — but only if it offers food and service that feel consistent with the unique identity and spirit of Birnam Arts.

# What People Want



## Ranked Demand List (From the multiple-choice data, based on frequency of selection and supporting comments)

This ranking gives the clearest picture of what would make people use the café more — and what they feel is currently missing.

1. New menu choices including hot food, wider variety, local/seasonal options
2. Extended hours & reliable opening times
3. Pre-show dining / evening meals
4. Outdoor service in summer / garden seating
5. More family-friendly options - children's meals, ice cream returning, high chairs, Peter Rabbit theme
6. Dietary and health-focused options - gluten-free, vegan, healthier meals, homemade soups
7. Service model improvements - smoother, more personal experience; some preference for table service delivery

# The Shop

Survey feedback indicates that the shop plays a modest but appreciated role within Birnam Arts. People enjoy browsing, and a number of regular visitors purchase cards, gifts, or locally made items.

However, respondents also noted that the shop could contribute more strongly to the overall experience if it had a clearer identity.

## Current strengths

- Attractive display area
- Good for browsing before/after events
- Appreciation for local craft items and handmade goods

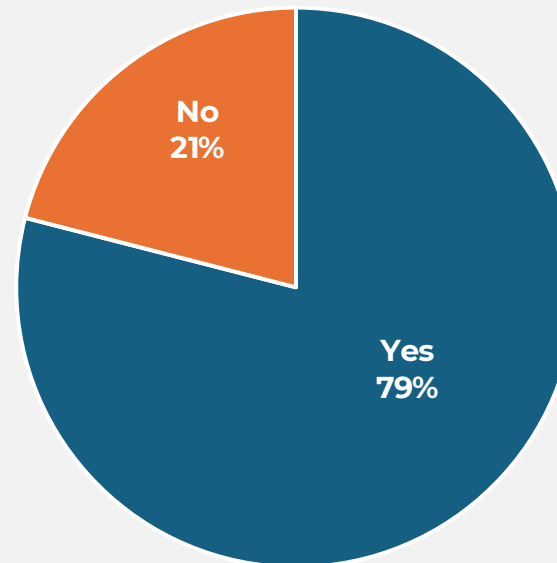
## What respondents want more of

- A clearer sense of what the shop is for
- More locally-made or artist-designed products
- Creative items linked to exhibitions
- Distinctive children's products (especially relating to Beatrix Potter)
- A more curated, arts-led range

Overall, the shop is not a major driver of visits but respondents clearly see untapped

potential if the offer were more distinctive and better aligned with the creative identity of the building.

## Have you visited the shop?



A strong majority of respondents around four in five have visited the Birnam Arts Shop. This is a notably high proportion for a small cultural retail space and indicates that the shop already functions as a meaningful part of the Birnam Arts visitor experience.

The data suggests that the shop:

- has high visibility and footfall, likely driven by café users, library visitors, Beatrix Potter visitors, families attending classes, and regular community users.
- is well integrated into the overall building flow, meaning physical placement and signage are working effectively.
- has potential for further revenue growth, as 79% already engage with it.

The 21% who have not visited represent a potential growth segment especially if the shop offer becomes more aligned with what the wider consultation shows people want (local products, creative items, better price points, seasonal ranges, more children's items, etc.).

# Shop Experience

**Feedback on the Birnam Arts shop indicates that it is a well-used and appreciated part of the visitor experience, with 79% of respondents saying they have visited it. Ratings for both product range and value for money generally sit in the middle to positive range, showing a reasonable level of satisfaction with what is currently offered. However, the open comments reveal a clear appetite for a stronger and more distinctive shop offer — one that reflects the character of Birnam Arts and the local area more directly.**

Across the responses, the most consistent message is a desire for more local, artisan and Scottish-made products. People want the shop to feel rooted in Perthshire, featuring the work of local artists, makers and producers. This is reinforced by requests for locally themed books, crafts, homewares, pottery, jewellery, food gifts and sustainable items. Many respondents voiced a preference for goods that are handmade, unique, or connected to the region, rather than mass-produced or generic.

A second strong theme relates to range and

variety. A number of respondents commented that the shop can feel sparse or limited and would like to see a broader range of items across different price points. Books, stationery, cards, affordable children's items and mid-priced gifts were frequently requested. This suggests a market for both "everyday" purchases by locals and higher-value items for visitors, with demand for a better balance between the two.

Several comments highlighted a need to rebalance the emphasis on Beatrix Potter merchandise. While visitors recognise its commercial importance, some felt that it currently dominates the shop and limits the appeal for locals or those seeking other types of gifts.

Affordability also appears as a recurring theme. While the shop is not generally considered poor value, respondents expressed a desire for more accessible pricing, particularly low-cost items suitable for children or small impulse purchases.

Finally, several respondents mentioned the visibility and layout of the shop, describing it as

hidden or disconnected from the café and wider building. They suggested that a more integrated retail flow — particularly linked to the café — could increase both footfall and sales.

Overall, the feedback suggests that the shop has strong potential to grow as both a revenue generator and a cultural asset, provided it focuses on a richer, more locally grounded product mix, enhanced variety, and a clearer presence within the building.

# Shop Feelings

Feedback fell into four clear demand categories:

## **Local, sustainable and artisan products (highest demand)**

A recurring statement across the consultation:

“More local makers, more local artists, more things that connect to Perthshire.”

People want:

- Local art, prints, ceramics and textiles
- Locally made soaps, candles, jewellery, homewares
- Scottish produce, books and themed gifts
- Unique, handcrafted items not found in Dunkeld shops

## **Greater variety, more stock and better price points**

- Respondents felt the shop can feel:
- Sparse or under-stocked
- Too heavily weighted towards Beatrix Potter
- Too expensive in places
- Lacking in everyday, affordable or mid-range items

What was requested:

- Wider range of gifts, cards, books
- More price points, from pocket-money items to mid-range gifts
- Seasonal items (Mother’s Day, Christmas, local events)
- Better rotation and freshness of stock

## **Better balance of Peter Rabbit vs other products**

Many value Peter Rabbit’s commercial importance, but:

- “Less Peter Rabbit. More local crafts.”
- “A little less rabbit, a bit more variety.”
- “BP sells well, but it dominates.”

People are not asking for its removal—just the right balance so the shop feels like Birnam Arts, not a single-theme attraction.

## **Enhancing the visitor experience**

- Respondents suggested simple ways to improve engagement:
- More visibility from the café and entrance
- A more inviting layout

- “Make it a space to browse before/after food”
- Pop-up makers, artist features or themed displays
- A better link between the shop and exhibitions
- Increased signage or window displays
- Children’s offers also came through strongly:
- Pocket-money toys
- More children’s books and nature-themed gifts
- Craft kits for kids
- Peter Rabbit maintained, but modernised alongside other ranges

## **Conclusion**

The shop helps define the look and feel of Birnam Arts. Strengthening the flow between café, programme and shop could strongly increase footfall.

# Product & Value

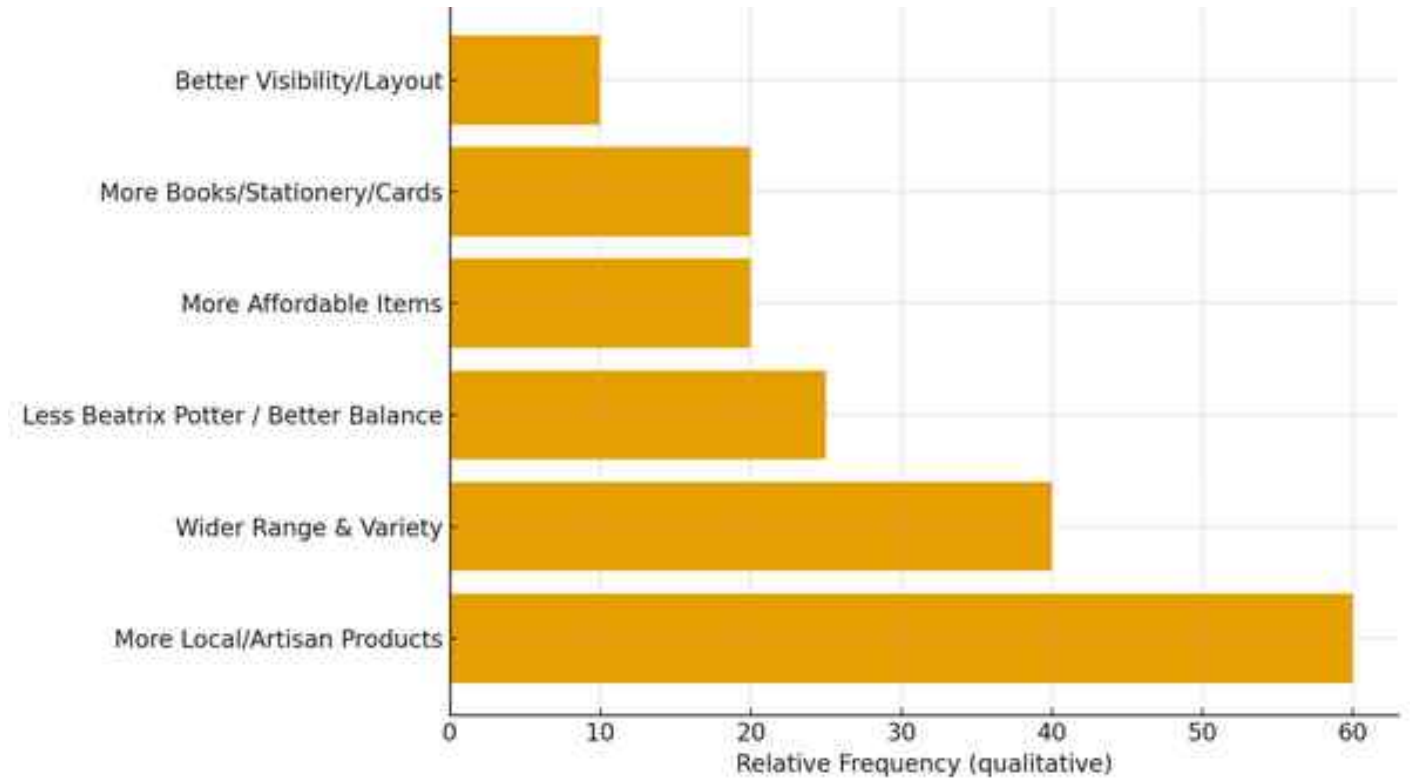
## Product Range Rating

Rating	% of responses
★	3.2%
★★	10.8%
★★★	33.5%
★★★★	30.4%
★★★★★	22.2%

## Value for Money

Rating Value	% of responses
£	2.8%
££	12.4%
£££	37.2%
££££	32.4%
£££££	15.2%

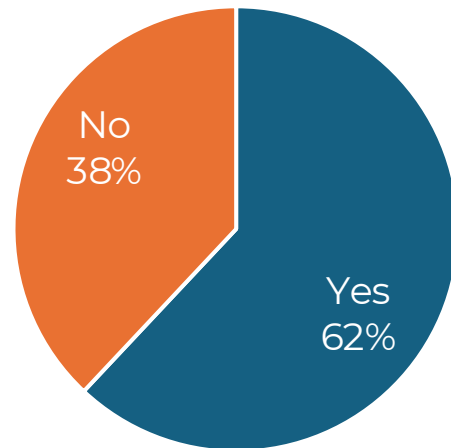
## What would you like to see more of?



# Beatrix Potter Exhibition

## Who Visits the Exhibition?

Survey responses show that the Beatrix Potter Exhibition is well-used, but not universally.



This indicates strong engagement, but also a sizeable group who may be either unaware of the offer or unconvinced of its value—an opportunity to widen reach, particularly among locals.

## How Visitors Rate the Exhibition

Rating	Percentage
Loved it (5 icons)	32%
Good (4 icons)	33%
Average (3 icons)	21%
Poor (2 icons)	8%
Very poor (1 icon)	6%

Two-thirds of visitors rate the exhibition positively, but a meaningful minority (≈14%) see it as tired or unengaging.

# What People Think

## Strengths (What people love)

- “It’s excellent for younger children.”
- “A fab little place—just needs some love and maintenance.”
- “A great asset for tourists and local families.”
- “The garden creatures and sensory elements are very popular.”
- “Lovely for toddlers and early-years children.”

The exhibition is seen as warm, charming and valuable, especially for under-5s, grandparents, and visiting families.

## Challenges (What isn’t working)

Recurring comments flag clear issues:

### 1. *The offer feels “tired” or dated*

- “It’s lovely but old fashioned.”
- “Needs a complete refurbishment.”
- “A bit tired around the edges.”
- “Same activities for years—needs rotation.”

### 2. *Limited interactive or modern*

### *engagement*

- “More multimedia please.”
- “Needs interactive displays for all ages.”
- “Could link better with local nature and ecology.”

### 3. *Perceived poor value / repeat visits unlikely*

- “Not worth repeat visits.”
- “Too expensive for what’s there.”
- “We had an annual pass but outgrew it quickly.”

### 4. *Garden maintenance concerns*

- “Garden needs spruced up.”
- “Pond area is hidden under leaves.”
- “Could be more obvious how to access it.”

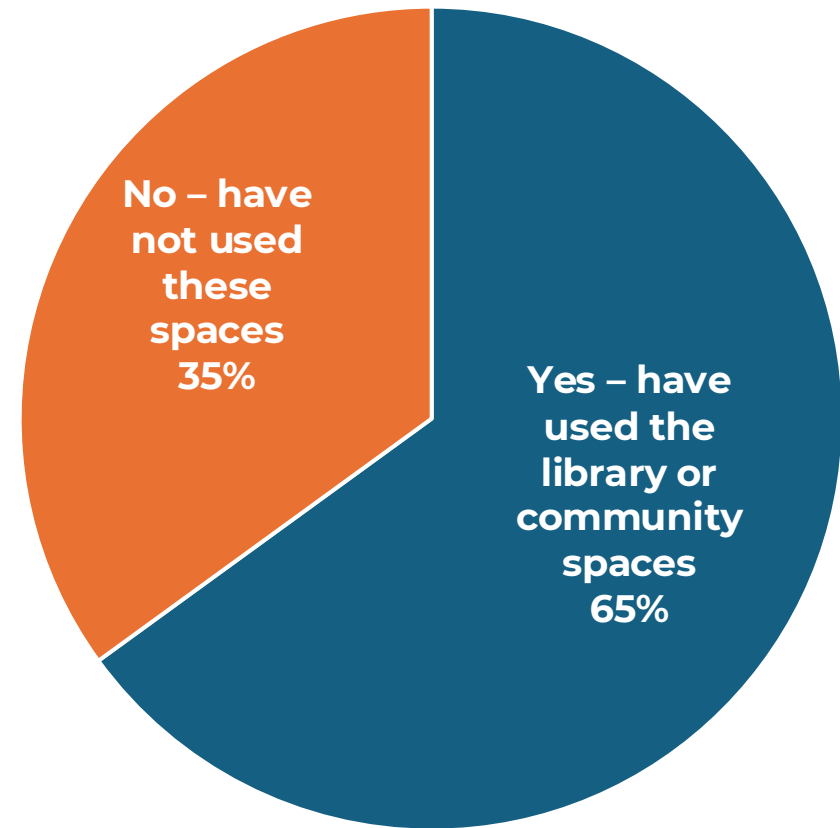
### 5. *Space could be used better*

- “Feels like wasted space not earning money.”
- “Could be used for workshops, storytelling or classes.”

# Library Usage

The library and wider community spaces at Birnam Arts are well used, with around two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents saying they access these facilities. This demonstrates that the centre's role as a community hub extends well beyond the café and events programme, with the library in particular acting as a consistent draw for both adults and families.

The 35% who do not use the library or meeting spaces represent a notable opportunity: many of these individuals are café users, event attendees, or local residents who may not be fully aware of the breadth of community facilities available. With targeted communication, clearer signage, and integrated programming (e.g., workshops, children's activities, reading events), the centre could convert more of these non-users into active library participants.

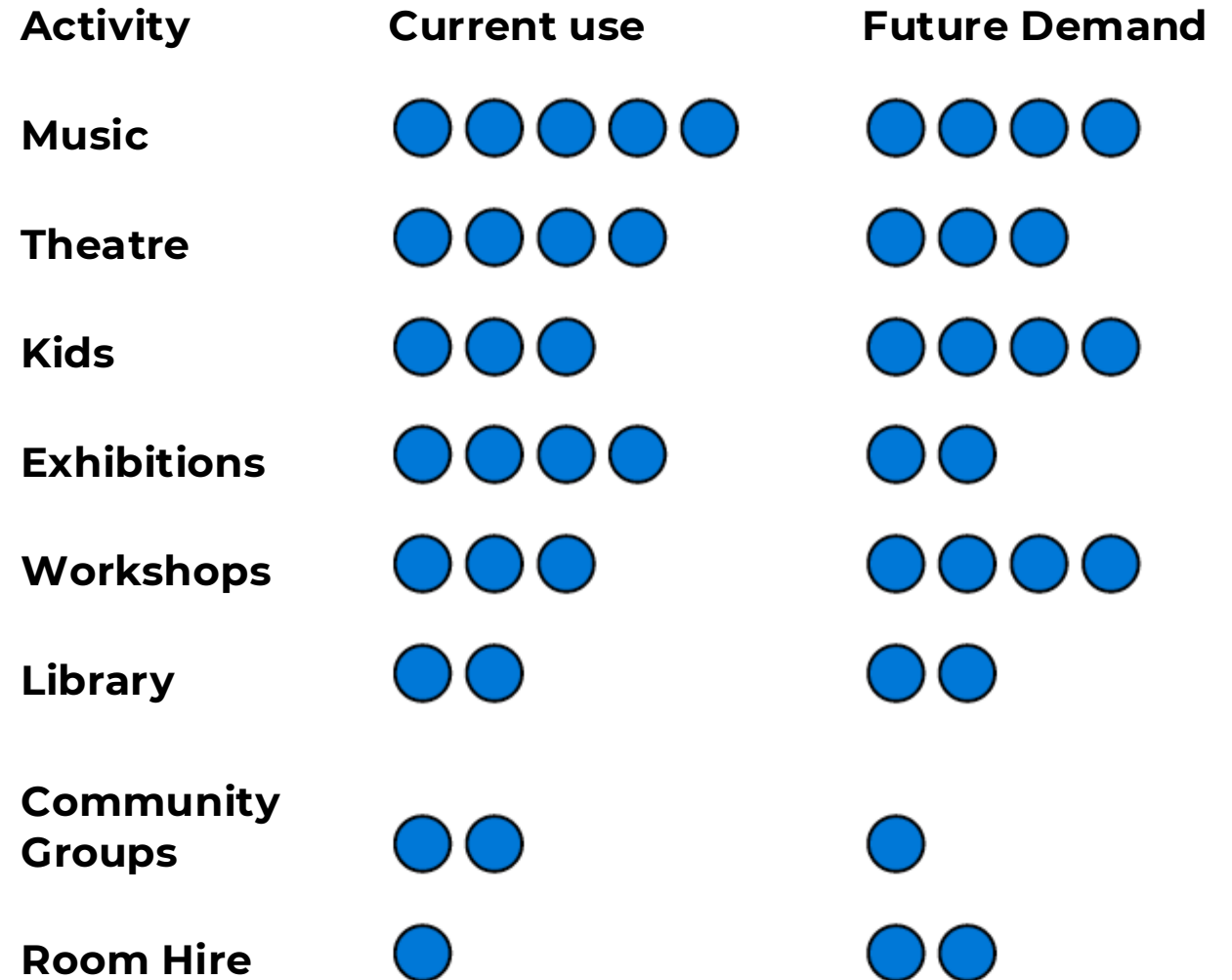


# Use of Community Spaces & Events

Across the consultation, respondents described a wide range of ways they currently use Birnam Arts' community spaces — from library visits, Bookbug, Lego Club, dance classes, visual arts workshops, choir rehearsals, and community meetings, through to professional hiring of rooms and attendance at the theatre, music, and exhibition programme.

The data shows that Birnam Arts functions as a multi-use community anchor, but there is also a clear message: many people want to use the building more, but feel that the current offer, scheduling, and price points do not always work for them. Parents of younger children, working adults, older residents, people seeking creative opportunities, and clubs/groups all articulated barriers that limit their use.

Respondents also repeatedly expressed appreciation for what is already strong — especially the library, Bookbug, exhibitions, visual arts, and certain elements of the events programme — while requesting a broader, more balanced mix that feels relevant to all ages, interests, and price points.



# Use of Community Spaces & Events

## What People Currently Attend (Ranked Demand List)

1. Most-attended activities (descending order):
2. Music events (across genres, community choirs, visiting musicians)
3. Theatre performances
4. Exhibitions & gallery visits
5. Children's events (Bookbug, Lego Club, Tiny Tunes, dance classes)
6. Community classes & workshops (art, crafts, Pilates, wellbeing, French conversation, SWI, Repair Café)
7. Use of library for reading, borrowing, study, Bookbug
8. Community meetings and groups (Just Singin', horticulture club, BIPs, etc.)
9. Meeting-room hire for organisations and businesses

This shows that Birnam Arts already supports a broad cross-section of the community, but with clear weight toward families, music

audiences, and people attending structured classes.

## What People Want More Of (Ranked Demand List)

Most requested new or expanded activities:

### A. For children & families

- More children's workshops & creative classes (arts, music, theatre, circus, crafting, storytelling)
- Weekend and after-school sessions
- Drama, dance and musical theatre classes
- Holiday clubs / half-day camp style activities
- Free-play space / family hub environment

### B. For adults

- Art & craft workshops (ceramics, printmaking, drawing, stained glass, woodwork, sewing, knitting, crochet)
- Wellbeing, health & movement classes (Pilates, yoga, meditation, dance)
- Talks, lectures, author visits, literary events

- Music events (broader genres, classical, folk/trad, contemporary)
- Community participation events (open mic, ceilidh, quiz nights, film nights)

### C. For mixed audiences / general community

- Workshops linked to exhibitions
- Seasonal workshops (Christmas crafts, wreath making, summer markets)
- Pop-up food events / tastings / supper evenings
- Heritage, nature, and ecology activities
- Events suitable for teenagers and young adults (a noticeable gap)

# Barriers to access

Across the consultation, people identified practical, financial, and programme-based barriers that limit their ability to take part.

## 1. Practical Barriers

- Timing: most common barrier
- Working adults struggle to attend daytime events
- Parents need after-school and weekend timings
- Older residents avoid late evenings
- Limited bus services (esp. Aberfeldy & rural areas)
- Parking limitations at peak times
- Some groups feel priced out of meeting rooms
- Some classes moved elsewhere due to hire costs
- Library opening hours:
- Several would use the library more if hours expanded

## 2. Financial Barriers

- Ticket pricing — particularly for families

- Meeting-room hire costs — too high for voluntary groups
- Workshops perceived as expensive for lower-income households
- Desire for “Pay what you can” options
- Local discounts
- Clearer advance information about costs

## 3. Programme Barriers

- Some find the programme “too niche” or “not broad enough”
- Families want more age-appropriate options
- Working adults and hobbyists want more out-of-hours classes
- Some don’t hear about events until too late
- Communication/marketing is currently a barrier to access

# What Would Encourage More Use

## **A. Flexible and family-friendly scheduling**

After-school, early evening, and weekend workshops

More daytime adult classes during school hours

Avoid children's theatre at 7 pm (too late for families)

## **B. More varied programme with broader appeal**

Balance niche arts with mainstream cultural events

Increase community-led and community-shaped activities

Restore ceramic classes, adult ballet, Pilates, dance

## **C. Improvements to accessibility and pricing**

Lower meeting room hire for community groups

More pricing tiers for families, low-income, seniors

Occasional free or donation-based events  
Discount for locals

## **D. Better communication & marketing**

Consistent promotion in The Bridge and on socials

Earlier notice of events

Clearer calendar or term-time programming

Better advertising for "third-party" events happening in the building

## **E. Space enhancements**

Brighter, refreshed meeting rooms

More comfortable seating / social spaces

Dedicated co-working day

Library open more often

More flexible use of entire building (shared spaces, multi-purpose rooms)

# Appetite for Friends Scheme

This section of the survey tested interest in the idea of a Friends or membership scheme.

Half of all respondents (50%) sit in the 'Maybe' category, which shows curiosity but not commitment. This indicates an opportunity to shape a scheme that meets local expectations before launching.

Almost one-third (31%) would support a scheme outright, which is a strong foundation.

Only 19% gave a firm 'No', suggesting resistance is relatively low and likely related to value perception, clarity, or affordability.

The data as a whole suggests the community is open to the idea, but needs:

- Clear messaging on benefits
- Reassurance about affordability
- A sense of belonging and reciprocity
- Visibility of how contributions directly support Birnam Arts

## Key findings

- Many respondents expressed initial interest in joining a small monthly scheme
- Around £5 per month emerged as a

comfortable contribution for many

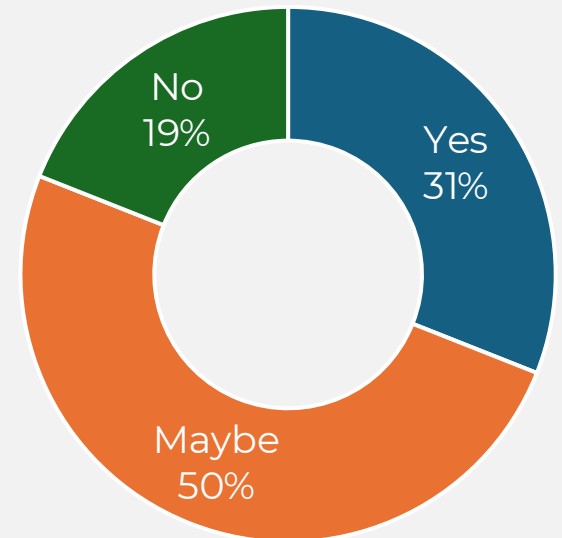
## Respondents expect clear, meaningful benefits, such as:

- priority booking
- members-only previews or receptions
- ticket discounts
- café or shop benefits

Some respondents said they needed more information to form a decision. Others emphasised that transparency around how funds would support Birnam Arts is essential.

Overall, the findings show no resistance to the idea instead, respondents view it as a practical way to support Birnam Arts' sustainability, if the scheme is clearly defined and well communicated.

## Support for a Birnam Arts Membership Scheme



# Willingness to pay

The survey shows a clear willingness to pay, but only at low-cost, low-risk levels, and only if the scheme is simple, transparent, and offers meaningful benefits.

## **The Anchor Price: £2–£3 per month (“the price of a coffee”)**

- This is by far the strongest signal.
- Most respondents who said Yes or Maybe selected this price point.

Why this works:

- Feels affordable and low-commitment
- Seen as “symbolic support” rather than a major purchase
- Fits local cost-of-living realities
- Considered appropriate for people who visit casually or irregularly
- Many comments emphasised that affordability is key, with several explicitly stating:
- £2–£3 per month – the price of a coffee.

## **Mid-Level Support: £5 per month**

- This is the second most popular level.
- People choosing £5 typically expect something tangible in return.
- What they expect at £5:
- Priority booking for events
- Discounts in the café or shop
- Free or reduced-price tickets occasionally
- Members-only previews
- People at this level are willing supporters but still value-sensitive.

## **Higher Tiers (£10–£20+)—A Minority, but Motivated**

A smaller group expressed willingness to pay £10 per month or more, or an annual donation of £30–£50, but only under specific conditions.

These supporters want:

- Strong benefits (discounts, meaningful perks)
- A compelling cultural programme (“depends on the events available”)
- Clear evidence of responsible financial

management

- Transparency about how their money helps the organisation
- Several mentioned they would pay more if Birnam Arts’ sustainability was at risk, showing a cohort of committed patrons who might be invited into a “Supporters Circle” or “Patrons Scheme.”

## **Who Will Not Pay — and Why**

Reasons for not contributing fall into predictable categories:

- Not a regular user
- Perceived poor value
- Affordability concerns
- Lack of trust or clarity
- Distance / seasonal residents

# Implications for Pricing Strategy

Tier	Price	Who it attracts	What they expect
Community Friends	£2–£3/month	Locals, light users, “Maybe” respondents	Symbolic support; simple perks like priority news
Supporter Member	£5/month	Regular visitors; families; event-goers	Priority booking, occasional freebies, discounts
Patron / Annual Friend	£30–£50 annually or £10+/month	Loyalists; cultural supporters	Strong benefits, recognition, transparency

# Securing a Sustainable Future

The open comments reveal a consistent and compelling picture of what local people believe Birnam Arts needs in order to thrive. Across nearly every response, three clear priorities emerge: a stronger café, a broader, more mainstream and family-focused programme, and a deeper reconnection with the local community.

## **Improve the Café and Hospitality Offer**

The café is repeatedly described as the single biggest opportunity to increase earned income. Respondents point to inconsistent hours, a limited offer, and missed opportunities to serve parents waiting during classes, evening events, and tourist footfall. Many see the café as the hub that could make the whole building financially stable through consistent dwell time and secondary spend.

## **Broaden the Events Programme**

Many respondents feel the programme is currently “niche” and does not reflect local interests. Parents emphasise a lack of family-friendly options, after-school activities, children’s theatre, weekend workshops, and

accessible timings. Others highlight a desire for comedy, folk music, contemporary dance, craft workshops, film nights, open mic nights, and community ceilidhs.

## **Strengthen Community Connection and Pricing**

There is a strong perception that community groups have been priced out of the building. Many mention that community classes moved elsewhere when hire prices increased. The community want BA to be affordable, warm, welcoming, and accessible — with regular groups, coffee mornings, baby groups, youth activities, and social events that make BA feel like a genuine hub again.

## **Improve Marketing, Communication & Visibility**

The marketing challenge is widely discussed: people often do not know what is on, cannot find information easily, or do not see signage in Dunkeld. Many propose better website navigation, stronger social media, and clear, consistent communication including signage on the A9 and posters in Dunkeld.

## **Rethink the Beatrix Potter Space**

Several respondents feel the BP exhibition is underutilised, expensive for families, and taking up valuable space. Ideas include refreshing the exhibit, repurposing part of the space, or replacing it with something more relevant to modern visitors. Others propose moving the library or café into that area.

## **Membership, Sponsorship and Fundraising**

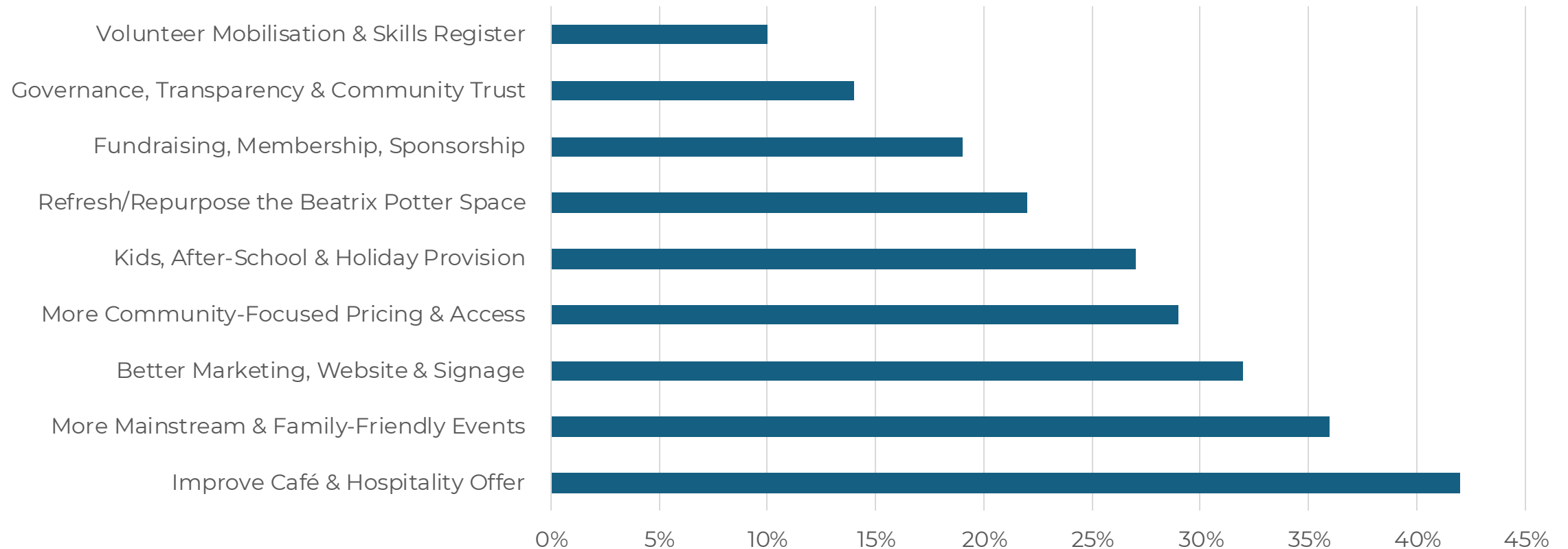
People are willing to support a membership model — especially at low monthly prices — but many feel the benefits must offer value, and the organisation must operate transparently. Others suggest sponsorships, “sponsor a seat”, corporate partnerships, raffles, festival weekends and charitable appeals.

## **Governance, Transparency & Trust**

Some respondents express concern about governance, communication, or decision-making.

# Ideas for the Future

**The community want Birnam Arts to feel like a vibrant hub again — centred around great café experiences, family-friendly programming, accessible pricing, and better marketing — supported by a transparent plan and genuine community involvement.**



# 5

## Birnam Tree

Post-its capture what people love about Birnam Arts and what they want to see more of.



# The Birnam Tree: Overview

The Birnam Oak Tree wall offered a unique window into the everyday experiences of those who walk through the doors of Birnam Arts. As an informal, low-barrier method, it captured spontaneous thoughts, feelings, wishes, and drawings from a broad range of users—families with young children, café regulars, older residents, workshop attendees, creative practitioners, and visitors passing through.

Across the 338 post-its, one of the strongest messages was the emotional importance of Birnam Arts. Many described it as a place that brings comfort, joy, peace, and community connection. The café, library, and shared spaces were praised for their warmth and atmosphere, with numerous comments expressing how being in the building simply “makes me feel better.” For young families in particular, Birnam Arts is seen as a lifeline during the winter months, offering routine, social contact, and a safe, welcoming place to be.

A second major theme was the desire for a more vibrant and visible programme of creative and cultural activities. Requests included pottery, printmaking, drawing clubs, digital art, music lessons, and a variety of

performances ranging from jazz and classical to disco nights and open mic sessions. Many contributors also expressed enthusiasm for family programming such as puppet shows, storytelling, art sessions, children’s theatre, and holiday events. The volume and variety of suggestions reflected a community eager for activity and connection.

Feedback also highlighted the practical elements that shape visitor experience. Many post-its related to the café—expressing love for its role in the community but wishing for improvements such as the return of homemade soups, better value, more consistent coffee, and extended hours that better align with classes and events. Families requested small but meaningful amenities such as a soft play corner, more children’s menu options, and a reinstated ice cream freezer. Visitors suggested clearer signage, better outdoor seating, and a visible “What’s On” board.

A number of comments addressed inclusion and accessibility. Several contributors called for autism-friendly or quiet sessions, more sensory-friendly activities, and greater diversity in future exhibitions. These suggestions

underline the potential for Birnam Arts to deepen its role as an inclusive cultural space.

Finally, many post-its simply expressed affection: drawings from children, messages of thanks, celebrations of the staff and volunteers, or joyful appreciation of the space. These contributions reinforce that Birnam Arts holds a special place in the hearts of many who use it.

Taken together, the Birnam Oak Tree responses offer a rich, grounded understanding of how people experience Birnam Arts day to day and what they hope to see in the years ahead. While informal, this dataset provides insight that is emotionally honest, highly engaged, and closely aligned with the themes emerging through the wider consultation.

# The Birnam Tree: Key Themes

- 1. Birnam Arts as a Place of Belonging and Wellbeing** Many contributors described the centre as calm, uplifting, inspiring, and important to their emotional wellbeing. Words such as haven, peaceful, comforting, joyful, and home-like were common.
- 2. A Desire for More Creative, Social and Cultural Activity** There was a strong and repeated appetite for more events, workshops, and performances for all ages. Music, arts, theatre, and creative learning featured heavily.
- 3. Family and Child-Friendly Spaces and Programming** Parents, carers, and children consistently expressed a desire for more daytime family activities, soft play, storytelling, after-school clubs, and child-friendly café options.
- 4. Improvements to the Café and Facilities** Feedback highlighted a wish for improved food offering, extended opening hours, better value, clearer signage, and enhanced indoor and outdoor spaces.
- 5. Inclusion and Accessibility** A number of post-its highlighted the need for autism-friendly sessions, quiet hours, more diverse representation in exhibitions, and accessible family experiences.
- 6. A Sense of Creativity, Community and Pride** Many contributions expressed affection and gratitude for Birnam Arts, celebrating it as the heart of the community and a place people are proud to have locally.

# Creative Scotland: Overview

The Creative Scotland reflection boards invited visitors to respond directly to questions about wellbeing, belonging, artistic development, and cultural experience. As a result, the tone of the responses was reflective and often heartfelt, with many contributors taking the opportunity to express how Birnam Arts supports them emotionally and creatively.

## Wellbeing and Emotional Impact

Visitors frequently described their experiences at Birnam Arts as uplifting, calming, grounding, or joyful. People spoke of the centre as a place that “makes me feel good,” “helps my mood,” and “is my creative haven.” The combination of a welcoming environment, friendly staff, and creative energy left many feeling nourished and restored. This aligns strongly with the wider consultation narrative that Birnam Arts is more than a venue: it is a place of wellbeing in the heart of the community.

## Community Connection and Belonging

The reflection boards also revealed how strongly people feel connected to others through their experiences at Birnam Arts. Many noted that they felt a sense of community even when attending alone, that they enjoyed being surrounded by people with shared interests, and that the atmosphere

makes it easier to meet new people. Comments from newcomers and those without family nearby were especially powerful; for them, Birnam Arts acts as a point of stability and connection.

## Artist Development and Creative Opportunities

The artist development board captured a clear expression of desire for more opportunities to grow, connect, and share creative practice. Contributors asked for:

- mentoring
- skills development (including digital)
- networking events
- rehearsal and practice space
- intercultural and international collaboration

These requests reveal a local creative ecosystem that is active but under-served, with significant potential for Birnam Arts to play a facilitative role in developing local talent and enriching cultural life.

## Enjoyment of Recent Cultural Experiences

When asked what they enjoyed most about recent events, workshops, or exhibitions, visitors spoke warmly about:

- the quality and passion of facilitators

- opportunities to try new things
- engaging exhibitions
- the mix of ages and backgrounds
- the relaxed and welcoming feel of creative sessions

Some responses referenced specific exhibitions or classes by name, highlighting that individual artists and facilitators are making a strong positive impact.

## Hopes for Future Exhibitions and Cultural Offerings

- Finally, visitors expressed a desire for:
- more contemporary art
- exhibitions by local artists
- work by New Scots and under-represented groups
- collaborative and thematic exhibitions
- opportunities for children to exhibit or create
- playful or imaginative themes (e.g., toy-based, spray painting, “swirly things”)

There was a notable appetite for diversity — not only in terms of artistic medium, but in the stories, cultures, and perspectives represented.

# Creative Scotland: Key Themes

The 55 post-its collected from the Creative Scotland reflection boards offered a more reflective and exploratory layer of insight. Unlike the spontaneous café wall, these boards invited visitors to pause and consider specific questions about their experience of Birnam Arts and its cultural value. Across the five themed boards, several consistent themes emerged:

- 1. Birnam Arts has a meaningful impact on personal wellbeing** Participants described the centre as calming, uplifting, restorative, and creatively inspiring.
- 2. Birnam Arts plays an important role in building and strengthening community connection** People spoke of feeling welcomed, included, and part of something shared—even when attending alone.
- 3. There is strong appetite for artist development and creative learning** Mentoring, skills development, practice space, and networking were common requests.
- 4. People want more of the activities they enjoy most** Workshops, exhibitions, performances, and interdisciplinary creative experiences were repeatedly celebrated.
- 5. Audiences are interested in a wider and more diverse cultural offer** Visitors asked for a mix of contemporary art, collaborative exhibitions, new voices, and themes that reflect diverse communities.

These themes mirror and reinforce the findings from the Birnam Tree wall and the broader consultation, giving confidence in the overall direction and coherence of what the community is telling us.

# What the Post-its Reveal

**When the post-its from the Birnam Oak Tree and the Creative Scotland reflection boards are read together, they form a remarkably coherent story about what Birnam Arts means to the people who use it. Comments point to a shared understanding of the value and purpose of this place.**

People repeatedly describe Birnam Arts as a place where they feel calm, welcomed, uplifted, inspired, supported, and connected. Many wrote about how simply being in the building makes them feel better. This emotional quality, expressed spontaneously and unprompted, is one of the clearest signals of what the community values most.

Hand in hand with this is a deep sense of belonging. People spoke of meeting others, chatting after classes, bumping into familiar faces, or feeling part of something even when attending alone. For newcomers, for families without local support networks, and for older residents, Birnam Arts functions as a place where community is encountered naturally and without effort. The post-its describe a space where people feel they can just be themselves and be part of a shared local life.

There is also a palpable appetite for creativity and cultural energy. Post-its overflowed with

ideas for events, workshops, performances, exhibitions, and opportunities to learn new skills. Many contributors want to make things, try things. They want music, art, movement, storytelling, and hands-on experiences. Suggestions included asking for pottery, printmaking, and writing workshops.

Families emerge as a strong voice. Parents and children express affection for the space and desire for more: more daytime activities, holiday events, child-friendly spaces, and creative experiences for younger age groups. For many families, Birnam Arts is not just a venue, it is a reliable sanctuary,, offering structure, community, and warmth.

Artists and creative practitioners asked for space to grow — mentoring, networking, rehearsal rooms, more opportunities to show work, and a more visible platform for local talent. They see Birnam Arts as a potential home for a stronger creative ecosystem.

People care about the café, and their comments whether about food quality, value, or opening hours reflect how central the café experience is to the feel of the wider building. Requests for better signage, outdoor seating, a children's area, or clearer information show how physical and operational details shape

the overall impression of Birnam Arts as a place to spend time.

Finally, there are numerous reflections on inclusion and representation. Calls for autism-friendly sessions, quiet hours, more diverse exhibitions, and spaces that feel accessible to all show that the community is thinking about who gets to participate and how Birnam Arts can continue to widen its welcome.

The post-its provide not just a list of individual ideas but a coherent picture of what the community sees in Birnam Arts:

- **A place of emotional connection.**
- **A place of belonging.**
- **A place of creativity.**
- **A place for family life.**
- **A place where culture and community come together.**
- **A place that people want to see thrive.**

This concluding picture built entirely from the words, drawings, and reflections pinned to a café wall and displayed on public boards is a powerful reminder of what Birnam Arts already is, and what people hope it can continue to be.

# 6

## Staff & Volunteers

Staff describe deep pride in Birnam Arts but also a sense of strain, reduced creativity, and uncertainty - revealing an organisation that matters profoundly to its people, even as they navigate change



# Staff & Volunteers: Overview

**The staff consultation session provided a candid and thoughtful insight into the lived experience of those who deliver Birnam Arts' services on the ground. Staff spoke openly about what they value, how recent changes have affected them, and what they hope the future might look like. Their voices reveal both a strong emotional connection to Birnam Arts and a clear-eyed recognition of the organisation's current pressures.**

Many staff expressed genuine affection for the centre and pride in working for an organisation that brings people together through art, music, creativity, and community life. They talked about enjoying the act of “making things,” feeling appreciated by visitors, and working collaboratively as part of a supportive team. This underlying warmth and commitment sit at the heart of their identity as staff members.

At the same time, staff described feeling the impact of rapid operational changes since late summer, particularly in the café, where the move toward a self-service model has made the work feel repetitive, transactional, and less joyful. Several reflected that, without a defined manager in post, communication feels unclear

and day-to-day decisions lack structure. Staff spoke of “just asking whoever is here” when issues arise, and of being unsure about responsibilities, escalation routes, or who to contact in specific situations. These uncertainties have created a sense of being unanchored at a time when consistency is especially needed.

Workload pressures were another recurring theme. Staff described a relentless pace with “never-ending” tasks and blurred boundaries between roles. The café and office teams both reflected that they are stretched thin, with some individuals struggling to stay within their contracted hours. Volunteers were described as essential to operations, yet staff noted that expectations are inconsistent and that volunteers sometimes lack clear direction. They also believe some volunteers would welcome more structured opportunities to contribute meaningfully.

Many of the reflections touched on purpose and identity. Several staff members spoke passionately about the creative heart of Birnam Arts and expressed sadness that this feels less visible in daily operations. They described a shift from a creative, vibrant café

and shop to something more routine and reduced. The Beatrix Potter exhibition was also felt to have lost some of the excitement it once generated. Staff expressed a desire for the building to feel more alive and creative again — for it to reflect the spirit that originally drew them to work here.

Staff acknowledged that change is necessary, but they also shared that it has felt fast, top-down, and difficult to influence. They voiced a need for clearer leadership, stronger communication, and a shared understanding of financial realities. Their vision for the future is hopeful: a Birnam Arts that combines creativity with community, where the café is vibrant from morning to night and the arts programme helps anchor the centre as a cultural asset for Highland Perthshire.

Overall, the staff voices reveal a team that cares deeply about the organisation's success, but who are currently navigating uncertainty, increased strain, and a sense of diminished creative energy. Their reflections offer important insight into how changes have been experienced internally and where support, clarity, and renewed vision will be needed in the months ahead.

# Why the Staff Voices Matter?

**The staff reflections form a powerful picture of what Birnam Arts represents to those who work within it every day.**

Their comments show not only the challenges they face but also the depth of their commitment, their pride, and their desire to see the centre flourish. The consistency of the messages across experiences, roles, and responsibilities highlights that staff are deeply invested in Birnam Arts' purpose and identity.

What comes through most strongly is that staff do their work because they believe Birnam Arts matters. They see it as a place that enriches community life, sparks creativity, and brings people together in ways that few other local institutions can. Their frustration, fatigue, or sense of disconnection is not a sign of disengagement, but rather an expression of how much they care and how closely they associate themselves with the organisation's values.

Their voices make clear that Birnam Arts' future is not only about financial resilience or operational efficiency; it is also about restoring a sense of creative vitality, belonging, and shared purpose. Staff want to feel connected again to the vision that originally inspired

them. They want to contribute meaningfully, to know who is leading, and to work in an environment where creativity is visible and valued.

In this sense, their insights mirror many of the themes that emerged in the public post-its: a desire for vibrancy, connection, creativity, and pride. The staff narrative underscores how central these qualities are not just for visitors but for those who bring Birnam Arts to life every day.

Their reflections remind us that sustaining Birnam Arts' purpose depends on the people who carry it and on ensuring they feel supported, empowered, and able to contribute to the future they so clearly believe in.

# 7

## Board

The Board workshop revealed a shared desire to renew Birnam Arts' purpose, strengthen relationships, and build a more confident, creative and sustainable organisation for the future.



# Board: Overview

**The Board workshop offered a structured opportunity for members to think creatively and collectively about Birnam Arts, using a series of rapid ideation and reflection exercises.**

Through Crazy 8s, themed prompts, and the grouping of ideas into clusters, participants were able to articulate; visually and succinctly how they see Birnam Arts today and what they believe needs to be explored to secure its future.

The exercises generated a large volume of ideas. Rather than converging prematurely, the session deliberately encouraged breadth, imagination, and honesty. As ideas were shared and grouped, clear patterns began to form. Many contributions focused on purpose and identity: questions such as “What is Birnam Arts for now?”, “Who is it here to serve?”, and “How do we balance being an arts centre with being a community hub?” were implicit across numerous sketches and phrases.

Another strong theme emerged around the relationships and culture within the organisation. Several ideas reflected concerns about communication, cohesion, and the need

for a renewed sense of unity and trust across Board, staff and volunteers. Participants used the creative format to express the feeling that the organisation has become fragmented, and that stronger internal alignment will be required to support any future plan.

Practical and operational themes also surfaced strongly in the drawings and written ideas. Board members raised questions about financial sustainability, the role of the café, the use of the building, and the need to better understand what “commercial” should mean in the context of an arts centre with a community mission. These reflections were not presented as solutions but as areas requiring deeper exploration.

The exercise also revealed the Board’s sense that Birnam Arts has significant latent potential. Many ideas focused on creativity, partnership, visibility, and reconnecting the public with the building. The Board recognised that Birnam Arts could offer more — culturally, socially, and commercially — but that this can only be achieved with clarity of vision, a realistic assessment of capacity, and a shared understanding of priorities.

As the session progressed, ideas were

clustered into broad concepts not as a strategy, but as a way of making sense of the volume and diversity of contributions. This clustering highlighted where the Board sees energy, concern, and possibility. It showed, visually, that the Board’s thinking spans:

- **identity and purpose**
- **people and relationships**
- **culture and creativity**
- **finances and sustainability**
- **community connection**
- **and the overall “feel” of the building**

The creative format allowed the Board to express these themes without the constraints of formal agenda items, revealing a more expansive picture of their current thinking.

# Why this Matters?

**The value of the Board workshop lies not in the individual ideas generated, but in what those ideas collectively reveal.**

They show a Board that is aware of the complexity of the moment Birnam Arts is in, and who recognise the need for greater clarity — clarity of purpose, clarity of identity, clarity of relationships, and clarity of direction. The workshop makes visible the tension between what Birnam Arts has historically been, what it is currently experiencing, and what it might still become.

The ideas also demonstrate that the Board sees both challenge and opportunity: challenge in the current pressures around finances, culture and communication; and opportunity in the strength of the community's emotional connection, the creativity that runs through the building, and the unrealised potential of its people and spaces.

Most importantly, the workshop reveals that the Board believes Birnam Arts must rediscover its sense of self before it can make confident decisions about the future. Their reflections speak to a need for reconnection — reconnection to purpose, to community, and

to one another — as the starting point for any future planning.

In this sense, the Board's contributions sit alongside the public and staff feedback as another layer of insight into why Birnam Arts matters, where it feels uncertain, and what aspects of its identity and operations will need deeper exploration as part of the wider review.

# 7

## Conclusions

Bringing the voices together: the key messages for Birnam Arts' future direction.



# Summary of Conclusions

**This consultation has shown one thing very clearly: people care deeply about Birnam Arts, and they want to see it succeed. Across the survey, post-its, staff discussions and the Board workshop, we have heard remarkably consistent messages about what is working, what is missing and what needs attention.**

People value Birnam Arts for how it makes them feel — relaxed, welcome, inspired and connected. They see it as a rare place where creativity, community and everyday life come together. But they also notice when things are not working as well as they could. They notice when the café feels less vibrant, when there are fewer creative opportunities, when communication is unclear or when the building feels quieter than it used to.

Staff told us they feel stretched and would welcome clearer leadership and better communication. Board members recognise that the organisation needs a stronger foundation both operationally and financially and that its purpose needs to be clearer for everyone: staff, volunteers, funders and the community.

When we look across all this feedback

together, we can see a clear line of sight from what people said to what Birnam Arts may need to focus on next:

## **1. Get the basics strong again**

Clear roles, better systems, stable finances and reliable operations — these are needed for the organisation to feel confident and for staff to feel supported.

## **2. Rebuild connection and communication**

People want to know what is on, when things are open, and how they can get involved. Better communication will help rebuild trust and visibility.

## **3. Bring back the creative energy**

There is a strong appetite for more workshops, more events, more exhibitions and a livelier café. Creativity is what makes Birnam Arts distinctive — and people want more of it.

## **4. Strengthen the experience for staff, volunteers and visitors**

Staff want clearer leadership. Visitors want a better café offer and clearer information. Volunteers want to contribute meaningfully. These are all connected.

## **5. Be proud of what makes Birnam Arts special**

People repeatedly described Birnam Arts as a joyful, calming, creative place. This feeling, the “spirit” of Birnam Arts is a real strength and should be protected and built on.

These five areas form the natural priorities that come from the consultation. They are not a formal strategy at this stage, but they provide a helpful structure for the Board as it begins to shape the next operating model.

They also offer a simple way to communicate the direction of travel to staff, volunteers, funders and the community:

**Birnam Arts needs to be strong, connected, creative, together, and true to its spirit.**

All of this comes directly from what people told us.