A VIEW FROM THE PEW

I find myself irritated by the constant requests for feedback. It seems impossible to buy anything online without getting an email inviting comment on the experience. "Click here and respond to our survey which will take no more than x minutes of your time and offers the opportunity to be entered in a draw which will give a £50 shopping voucher to twenty lucky customers". Tempting, isn't it? I often find the survey full of anomalies and questions which I cannot answer. For instance, a bank asked me whether I was likely to recommend its services to a friend or family; my answer was definitely not – but not because of dissatisfaction, but because I do not want to recommend financial products to others. I also wonder whether the institutions take any notice of my answers. One of our local supermarkets recently changed the terms of its loyalty scheme, reporting that the changes were in response to customer feedback. If that was the case, then I wasn't a typical customer because I don't like the new system.

Yet surely there IS a place for feedback and is it not traditional that the customer is to be regarded as right? Those in authority win respect by listening to their staff, their clients, their constituents, learning from them and taking their viewpoints seriously. Consultation should make a difference. Let me give a few examples.

We should all be grateful to the Test Valley Borough Council and to our Parish Councils for their engagement with our community and for the opportunities to contribute to the Neighbourhood Development Plans and to debates on matters such as housing and speed limits. In my experience the Stockbridge Surgery is also very receptive to patient feedback. The Village Shop too invites the views of residents at its annual meeting. At a local level I am happy to encourage surveys and feedback. It is more the large national institutions that make me uneasy.

So what about the Wallops Parish News? The editors ask for comments, ideas and articles to enhance the publication. So please do let Pete and Esther Jones have your views. Then there are the two churches. Readers may feel that the way the church does things is set in stone and there's no point in making suggestions; but as a member of the Over Wallop church council I'd like to assure you that your feedback will be taken seriously. Contact details are in the magazine and on the two church websites. The Church of England does of course have its own rules and regulations but since we believe that the core message of Christianity is as relevant and true today as it ever has been, we must do our best to communicate it in ways that will make sense to the current generation and encourage them to engage with the church community. The Alpha course (see page 27) is one such way. So we need to recognize that the shop is our shop, the magazine is our magazine, the church is our church, the villages are ours. So let us all both receive what they offer and contribute to their development and improvement.

Stephen Baldock