

Name of project/group
St Michael and All Angels
Type of project
Social Action/Opening up Public Services
Location
Spencers Wood, Reading, Berkshire (Diocese of Oxford, Church of England)
What was involved
<p>St Michael and All Angels is a church in a conservation area serving the villages of Spencers Wood and Grazeley. In September 2010, a café and internet suite was opened in the church. It was constructed as a stand-alone structure with the café below and the internet suite above in the Gallery.</p> <p>The church talked to an architect contact to see if a café in the church was a possibility; talked to the PCC; visited churches with similar projects; formed a committee of people (mainly but not exclusively) from the church who were interested in the project; interviewed architects and appointed one whom, they considered, understood their vision and the building.</p> <p>They became involved in the parish development plan of Shinfield Parish Council which enabled them to present their project to the Parish Council and gain their support. The church talked at their AGM to explain the project and gain further support in the community.</p> <p>The main partners in developing and implementing this project were Oxford Diocesan Advisory Committee; South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) through Shinfield Parish Council who had decided to support the project as their community project for the area.</p> <p>The project cost £95,000. Half came from church fund-raising events, donations, grants; and half came from SEEDA.</p> <p>The church also had advice and support from the Diocesan Advisory Council; professional expertise from a project manager who donated his services to the church; and an architect. For the café management, they obtained advice from the Community Council for Berkshire; and from the Food and Health Department of Wokingham Borough Council.</p> <p>There were a number of other offers of financial and practical help: one firm donated lighting features; a designer created the website and logo free of charge; a professional project manager gave his expertise and time to oversee the building of the café; a planning consultant gave his services for the planning application for the car park (the final phase of the project to be completed this summer).</p>
Achievements
<p>Caf'Active is open to all every morning at 2pm. The Gallery with WiFi and seating for 24 people can be hired for conferences and business meetings. Computer club sessions are also run to help the community with computer skills and problems.</p> <p>There is a café management committee which meets once a month; a part time paid manager; a booking officer (voluntary basis). There is also a Community Partnership Group which enables representatives of local organisations to feed in the views of the wider community, so that they can be taken into account in future planning. The work led to the church learning</p>

about a range of new skills, including café management, food hygiene and safety regulations, and practical building issues.

The numbers entering the church have increased, and it is now open 7 days a week from 9.30am onwards. The café makes a profit which helps with the running cost of the church as a whole.

Many of the volunteers who help run the cafe are not churchgoers, but believe in the project and support it. Groups which are not linked to the church e.g. the tennis club and a volunteer driver scheme use the facilities. The national gardening charity Thrive is also using St Michael's for one of their charitable projects with people suffering from mental or emotional problems.

Future plans

Members of the Community Partnership Group continue to meet six-monthly and help ensure that the café meets the needs of the wider community. The church has just obtained planning permission for a car park and will also do a full landscaping of the grounds.

There are plans to open a community shop in the grade II*, St Mary the Virgin, Beech Hill, another church in the Loddon Reach Benefice. After various ideas, and working with an architect, a plan has been decided and a Faculty is being applied for (See: http://www.loddonreach.org.uk/beece_hill.htm)

Lessons Learnt

The church considered that the experience had taught:

- the value of consulting the wider community;
- the benefits of looking for best practices elsewhere;
- that without some form of external funding, fundraising could have been a problem;
- the importance of having a good architect who can understand the vision, the church building and the worship needs, and could come up with a sensitive and attractive solution.

Project contact

Church websites: <http://www.spencerswoodchurch.org/> and <http://www.cafactive.org/>

May 2010

If you would like this document in a different format, please contact
our Customer Services department:
Telephone: 0870 333 1181
Fax: 01793 414926
Textphone: 01793 414878
E-mail: customers@english-heritage.org.uk