

CASE STUDY

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, STADHAMPTON, DIOCESE OF OXFORD, COFE

www.stadhampton.org/village/village-hall-at-st-john-s

Population: 832 (2011 Census)

A joint project between the Parochial Church Council, St John the Baptist and the Stadhampton community resulted, in October 2013, in the creation of Stadhampton's Village Hall at St John's. Situated about 8km north of Wallingford, in South Oxfordshire, the village needed space for community events and the PCC wanted to broaden church activities and outreach.

The church building (Grade II) was basically sound, but had no mains water or drainage, was damp and cold and stood empty for six days a week. Initially the village Building Project Team was intending to build a new hall, but gradually an idea formed which was tested through consultation and public meetings that by creating a community space within St John's, two problems would be solved.

Between 2008 and 2013, at a cost of £380,000, the church was reordered to provide new comfortable and flexible seating and underfloor heating and a new lighting system was installed.



© Jola Reczynska September 2013

A small extension was added to the west end to house the boiler and fully accessible toilets. A fully equipped kitchen was built in the north aisle. A new audio system was installed and a digital projector, screen and DVD player are available for use.

There is a service every Sunday. In addition, it is now available for hire from Monday to Saturday and Sunday afternoons. It has become a popular venue with a booking calendar on the village website. Currently regular events include a book club, parent and toddler club, Pilates classes, a ukulele group and a cinema night.

During the building phase, the project team started out as a sub-committee of the Parish Council as it had initiated the need for a village hall. Once the decision to modify the church had been agreed, for administrative reasons, it changed its accountability to the Parochial Church Council (PCC) but continued to provide regular reports to both organisations. To ensure a broad range of views, the membership of the project team included church-going and non-church going members of the community along with a Parish Councillor, the Vicar, and a Churchwarden. The chairperson was elected from the membership.

A number of options for managing the new hall were considered for its operational phase from sub-letting it from the church to handing over total responsibility to the PCC. Finally, it was decided to opt for a similar model to the project phase as it had successfully balanced the interests of both the secular community and the church.



Completed kitchen at Stadhampton © Mike Peckett June 2013

At the time of writing, key roles on the management committee include a Churchwarden, a Parish Councillor and the Booking Clerk; the rest of the committee (of eight) is made up of people largely involved in the halls user groups and the Vicar has an open invitation to attend any meetings. The management committee is guided by a document defining roles and responsibilities. These include: how running costs are shared; fundraising and apportionment of any profits and the maintenance of the fabric of the building, etc.

However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit new volunteers to join committees. *“We are not there yet but I can see a time where we will need to revisit the traditional ‘committee’ model. At present, people’s lives seem to be busier than ever and whilst it is possible to get volunteers to take on occasion tasks, people tend to be reluctant to give their precious leisure time to ongoing commitments. One idea would be to use new technology to run meetings, another might be to have one person running the hall who is accountable to the PCC but perhaps this would have to include a paid honorarium or a salary which would have a knock-on effect on hiring fees and hall usage. As the accountable body, the default position would be for the PCC to take on full responsibility but this approach would lack the spirit of community partnership we have enjoyed thus far. So giving a great deal of thought to how your new facility will be managed in future is very important. You cannot assume that your building project team will morph into the management committee! The successful management of the new facility is a very different but equally essential role.”*

Ann Stead, Chairman, Management Committee, Village Hall at St John’s, Stadhampton

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