

CASE STUDY

ST JOHN'S, FERNHAM, DIOCESE OF OXFORD, COFE

Population: 245 (2011 Census)



“We have not only provided a building for the community, which needed one, but provided a mechanism by which the church building, which remains a place of worship, is managed and supported by the community, and that is a really significant development.”

Neil Sutherland, former Chair of Project Inspire

St John's Church, Fernham, doubles as the village hall offering a high quality space with state-of-the-art audio-visual and sound equipment and accessible kitchen and toilet. It can seat 100 comfortably.

The village, situated about 2 miles south of Faringdon in the Vale of White Horse, faced a big problem when its village hall burnt down and an alternative space became unavailable.

At the same time, regular services at St John the Evangelist, the Grade II listed parish church, were only attracting an elderly congregation of about half a dozen. The PCC was increasingly concerned about rising maintenance costs, a high repair bill and future usage.

Led by the village in close association with the church, it was decided to extensively reorder the interior of the church. A Project Team was largely responsible for making the building conversion happen while in parallel, the Church Warden ran a separate project to gain funding for the new roof.

The Project Team set up Project Inspire, a charitable trust set up as a company Limited by Guarantee to manage the conversion, and cover the running costs for the building's use for community activities, services and other church activities.

After long and careful negotiations with the Diocese, an agreement was reached on the management of the building post-conversion.

Project Inspire took on the repairing lease from the Diocese and responsibility for the routine maintenance of the building with an expectation, written into the lease, that if there are major works, Project Inspire will pay 60%, while the church community and PCC will contribute 40%, a ratio of 60:40 reflecting the split between chancel and nave areas.

In June 2010, the building reopened. While still used for church services, it can also now be hired to host a wide range of activities and events, including concerts, anniversaries, birthdays and Annabelle's Nursery which opened in September 2016.



The refurbished space offers an attractive and well-equipped refreshment area including a hot plate, sink and dishwasher; flexible seating options and a fully accessible toilet. Its zone controlled underfloor heating ensures that the building is kept warm throughout the winter.

At a meeting of villagers in May 2012, it was agreed that Project Inspire and another group, the Fernham Events Committee, should join forces to become the Fernham Village Trust. This charitable trust, set up as a company limited by guarantee to limit the liability of the Trustees, runs village events and now manages the use of St John's and Fernham Village Hall by the community and the church and covers the running costs. The management committee is elected every year at the Trust's AGM and members serve for a year.

The PCC pays to hire the building for its services and other church activities, such as weddings and funerals. It also raises funds for its annual parish share, which goes towards clergy costs, and helps to cover the mission and outreach of the church.

The Village and church share the same website www.fernham.info which includes an online booking system.



Watching the Royal Wedding 29th April 2011 © Neil Sutherland