

CASE STUDY

ST MICHAEL, FLORDON, DIOCESE OF NORWICH, COFE

www.achurchnearyou.com/flordon-st-michael // www.flordonvillage.org

Population: 281 (2011 Census)

The Flordon Community Centre, which hosts a number of popular community events including a jumble sale, musical comedy gigs and a movie night - Views from the Pews - is based inside the St Michael's Church.

It was decided to adapt the church for community use and provide a welcoming venue in Flordon, a small village with roughly 300 residents situated about 13km south of Norwich. There was no other public building in Flordon that could be used as a community meeting place since a private hall much used by the village was closed 4 years before. Without a place to meet there would be nowhere to hold village events with a resulting loss of community spirit.

In 2006 a questionnaire was sent to all 117 households of which 80 responded (68%). 70 households were in favour, 64 would support fund-raising activities and 62 said they would make use of the facilities proposed.

The Project Team was made up of parish and church councillors and Flordon Community Group members. Early on, they decided against erecting a village hall as there was no obvious

site and it would mean having to maintain two buildings. The church is located in the centre of the village close to social housing and with a green space around it, a perfect location for a hall to improve social cohesion within the village.

The church itself was in need of repair and in danger of closing due to its small congregation. The project started in 2005 with Phase one of repairing the roof and walls which cost £117,000 and was completed in 2009. The second phase was to convert the inside. Some of the initial ideas had to be scaled back owing to difficulty in raising sufficient funds. The work comprised: underpinning and repairing the vestry and converting it to a disabled-friendly lavatory; removing the pews and purchasing tables and chairs (that raised a few eyebrows); replacing the floor bricks with an oak floor; re-laying the porch floor to obtain no-step access; constructing a kitchenette at the back of the church; providing new heating; and decorating throughout. The Jacobean pulpit and nave were left undisturbed. This cost £90,000. In total the project has taken eight years to bring to fruition. Norfolk ProHelp whose members

provided pro-bono assistance in areas of legal advice, buildings advice and publicity was crucial to the success of this project.

St Michael's Community Centre was opened in July 2013. The PCC is the landlord and the St Michael's Flordon Trust, the tenant. The Trust is composed of parish councillors, church members and Flordon Community Group members. Under the lease, the Trust will be permitted to use the entrance porch, nave and rebuilt vestry. The chancel is reserved solely for worship.

Food and drink is prepared and served in the kitchenette at the west end of the nave and a hearing loop was also installed, funded by the Snelling Trust. Comfortable chairs have been sponsored by parishioners and people with family links to the village subscribing £4,000 and the Centre/church also offers plenty of parking. The community centre is available for hire and is well utilised by the community.

The church holds three services each month – including on the first Sunday when the congregation enjoys a 'shared breakfast and then a simple short act of worship.