

# CASE STUDY PROVIDING A COOL REFUGE DURING A HOT SUMMER



**N.B.** This case study considers only one possible approach, which will not be suitable for every church. Always seek professional advice.

## Key Points

- Churches such as St Mary's Church, Ellenbrook have a high thermal mass because of their thick walls.
- Throughout the hottest days of the 2022 heatwave, St Mary's was able to maintain a cool temperature and mobilise with short notice to provide a welcoming space for their community.
- Volunteers made extensive use of a previously installed kitchen to offer cold drinks and snacks.
- This action generated national media attention and engaged unreached members of the local community.



1 Cold drinks and snacks were available, as well as volunteers for a welcome and chat

2 Pews provided coworking and reflective space

3 The environmental work of St Mary's is a key missional priority

## The context

From the 16th to 19th of July 2022 the UK experienced a record breaking heatwave, putting many vulnerable people and children under risk of heat exposure. In Greater Manchester temperatures peaked at 37.7°C. Many churches across the country reacted to this crisis, including St. Mary's, Ellenbrook. The church remained open over these days as a place of refuge from the heat for the local community.

For more information, visit the church's [website](#) or its entry on the [Church Heritage Record](#).

## Previous Level of Preparation

- St. Marys already had an active and motivated environment team taking actions to decrease the church's carbon footprint and increase biodiversity in the immediate surroundings.
- St. Mary's had a diverse range of spaces including a café area with tables and chairs, the church hall, as well as a kitchen and toilet. It also had Wi-Fi available as a result of live-streaming services over the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The church had close links with the wider community and had a network of volunteers and regular users of the building.
- The church had created a good social media presence, with members of the community on Facebook.

### **What was done?**

After hearing about other churches opening their doors on the 15th July, as temperatures began to rise across the country, the vicar at St Mary's approached the environmental team with the idea to open the church building for the use of the wider community in Ellenbrook.

Despite the short notice, the environmental team and members of the congregation were able to:

- open, and man with volunteers, the church building for three days,
- utilise the kitchen and café areas to offer refrigerated drinks and ice creams,
- provide a range of spaces across the church building for quiet reflection, co-working, or social space.

Over the three days of the heatwave, St Marys was able to stay relatively cool, remaining under 20°C until the final afternoon.

Throughout this time period, the regular functions of the church continued, and volunteers were able to chat to and serve members of the local community, as well as providing spiritual support and prayer.

### **How well did it work?**

St. Mary's remained open and available for the community across the entirety of the heatwave and was able to shelter a number of community members, including some who had very limited experience of the church previously.

They were able to leverage community connections to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the local community were well cared for.

Their actions, as well as the wider actions of the environment team, have generated interest and good feeling among the community that is still remarked upon. The vicar of St Mary's was interviewed on BBC 5 Live about the experience, generating a significant amount of traffic on social media.

### **How much did it cost?**

- There were minimal costs for this action, besides the provision of cold drinks and ice creams.
- Food and drink was provided out of the church's existing budget, however, it was made possible for users to give donations.

### **What could others learn from this case study?**

1. Using the church as a heat refuge can be achieved at low cost and short notice.
2. Create and maintain a social media presence, particularly with areas of the community that may not regularly make use of the church building.
3. Environmental actions can be a foundational part of a missional strategy and can be particular helpful for reaching those who do not attend Sunday services.
4. By creating a response plan in advance of such an event, it would have been easier to find a cohort of volunteers and would raise the level of awareness in the wider community.
5. Media interest in environmental matters, particularly at a time of crisis, will be heightened and actions taken by the church may attract their attention.

*"This is what we are meant to do, if it happened again I'm sure we would do the same thing but this time we would be able to organise it better and help more people I hope"*

Environment Team Member, St Marys