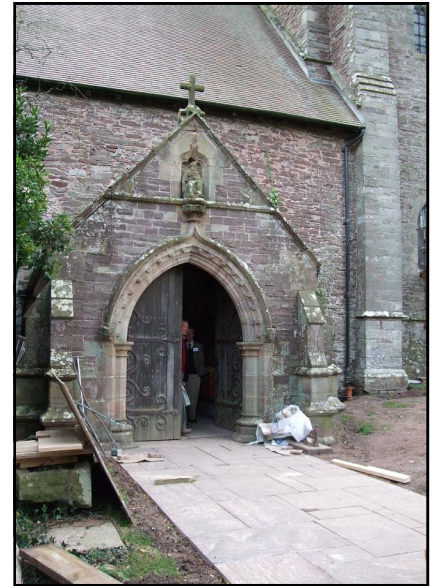


St Peter's, Peterchurch, Diocese of Hereford

St Peter's is an impressive 12th century Grade I listed building which stands in the small village of Peterschurch situated in the Golden Valley in South West Herefordshire. The area is very rural with many families feeling isolated with few opportunities and a lack of access to services. Herefordshire council were looking for ways to deliver children's services in the area when they approached the Hereford Diocese and expressed an interest in St Peter's. At the time the church had no facilities and the Local Authority offered £20K towards the cost of putting them in. A vision developed, and the whole community backed the idea of using the church for a variety of activities. The project to refurbish the interior involved freeing up space by removing the pews, environmentally friendly under floor heating, a lift, lighting, toilets, kitchen, consulting room and a new mezzanine floor with access into the bell tower to provide an additional room. The project was finished at the end of 2009 and is an exemplar of extended church use and partnership working.



Exterior of St Peter's

Who were your main partners in developing and implementing this project?

Since the start of 2000, the Diocese of Hereford has worked hard to forge partnerships and to create working relationships with the Herefordshire Partnership and the Herefordshire Council, highlighting that the church was willing to develop their buildings for wider community use. As a result of a local conference on this subject, the Early Years and Extended Services (EYES) department of the local authority contacted the Diocesan Development officer (Wendy Coombey) asking if they could have discussion with the Peterchurch PCC about the possibility of using the church buildings for the delivery of children's services in the Golden Valley.

The Surestart programme, being delivered by EYES, was having particular difficulties due to a lack of suitable facilities in the area. The existing community centre was not suitable for their use as it was almost permanently used by a mother and toddler group in the day. EYES and St Peter's PCC entered into discussions and both parties felt the church was a viable option, providing the correct improved facilities could be installed in the church building.

How did you start?

A project team made up of the PCC, local authority officers, representatives from the wider community and the DAC was formed. The PCC held a public meeting and distributed a questionnaire to ascertain the level of support for the project and to examine other potential uses for the building. They were mindful that they did not want to compete with the existing community centre, and when forming the committee to develop the church project, they deliberately included representatives from the community centre on the project development group.



Members of the project team

The group also carried out a detailed audit of existing community facilities within a ten mile radius to see what else was available or was needed and this did highlight some gaps in service provision, especially in relation to health care. The group then set about developing the project and appointing an architect.

What was the funding strategy?



Work underway in St Peter's

EYES offered £250 k towards the cost of the refurbishment. In addition Advantage West Midlands offered £100 K from the Multi Use Facilities programme and several trust funds, including the Church Urban Fund, Church and Community Fund, offered funding towards the project. Herefordshire Council also offered funding from their Community Buildings programme and Cultural Services opened up discussions with regard to putting a permanent library facility in the church building, run and staffed by volunteers. This was incorporated into the plans and funded by them.

What was the total cost of the project?

The project costs totalled £450 K, including all fees and the cost of equipment.

What lessons were learnt? What would you have done differently?

What's been great about this project is the church and community have taken a whole village approach to developing the church building, giving a credibility that has helped them to engage with a whole range of organisations that can make a difference to their lives on a daily basis. The project is proof that the approach recommended in Realising the Potential works. Its good for the church and its good for the communities in which we are placed.

What skill sets or knowledge proved to be the most important in making this project happen? Did you as a church already have these skills among the PCC, incumbent, wider congregation, community?

The Project has involved a wide spread of people from the community who have learnt how to:

- carry out community consultations
- develop a funding strategy
- look at options appraisals
- carry out an audit of what's already available in the community
- make detailed and complications applications to funding bodies



The facilities and lift inserted into the nave

With increasing confidence St Peter's are now looking for revenue funding for a youth worker and centre manager to help co-ordinate the activities in the church centre. The church development is part of a two phase project that will see the church complimenting the activities in the new community centre sited next door. The idea is to create a rural hub serving the people of the Golden Valley, providing a number of services currently only available in the nearest towns – 13miles in each direction.



Kitchen and toilet facilities

Successes:

EYES will be using the centre, now known as St Peter's Church Centre, 14 hours a week. During this time they will be running sessions with young families from the Golden Valley area - Job Centre Plus, parents support groups, healthy eating sessions, skill building. The project has also received support from the local authority Community Regeneration Team and from the local 3rd Sector Infrastructure Organisation, Herefordshire Voluntary Action.

The library operates under a lease because it is a permanent feature, while the children's services can be covered by a licence.

To what degree has this project contributed to the sustainability of the building itself?

The project has met several objectives and addressed several needs of the Peterchurch Community: a long term use for an underused community facility and resource, ensured the sustainability of a major heritage building now in regular daily use, helped address the issue of access, increased service delivery from the church centre, created a greater sense of community cohesion and people working together to address their own needs, improved access to cultural activities through the facility provided in the Library and an improved performance space, and improved quality of life for families and young children.



Library shelves in the bell tower



Ingeniously designed storage space in the nave