

# Church creates vibrant space for lone workers

IMAGINE that you're self-employed or work largely at home. You have no colleagues to bounce ideas off, or to socialise with during the day.

You might be looking for a space where you can work in peace, pause for coffee and chat, and to connect with other like-minded people. Now St Luke's Church in Southsea has created just that kind of space for you.

The inside of the church has been refurbished to provide a co-working space during the week. It has a fully-functioning coffee bar, long conference tables to work on, high-speed Wifi, comfy chairs for meetings – and you can also join in with the church's regular rhythm of prayer.

It's all part of the redevelopment of St Luke's Church, in Greetham Street in the centre of Portsmouth. It already reaches out effectively to students living nearby. This should help it to connect with local people working during the week.

It is called 'The Host Space', a name designed to suggest God acting as the host of the building. It also involves two part-time pioneer ministers, Mark Gandey and Abi Lane, who help to create an effective working environment and offer support.

Mark, who is a digital marketing professional and oversaw the development of Harbour Church's coffee shop, said: "We're offering this space partly because local data shows an increase in young professionals in their parish. The Host aims to support new



Pioneer ministers Mark Gandey and Abi Lane in the Host Space, inside the refurbished St Luke's Church, Southsea

businesses, alongside making local entrepreneurs aware of common social issues in the area.

"To prepare for this, we wrote a business plan, visited similar co-worker spaces elsewhere and took advice from experts in this field. We wanted to be realistic about what we could provide and who we were aiming at."

And Abi, who is a business graduate who owns her own ethical clothing company said: "The business is built on ethical, kingdom principles. We aim to help people to network, to think about the social impact of what they do, and to be aware of

the transformation that faith can bring.

"So, for instance, the furniture in the space is upcycled. We've reclaimed it from being thrown away, or bought it from charity shops. And there is a place within the church where regular prayer will happen throughout the day, showing that encounters with God are still at the heart of what happens here."

One important aspect of the transformation of St Luke's was the recycling of its old 19th century pews to create the long conference tables and the coffee bar. Paul Tipping, from Salty Sea Dog Does



Top: the Rev Annie McCabe, vicar of St Luke's, with (left) Aaron Sayers and Paul Tipping, who recycled the pews; below: the Host Space in action

Wood, and Aaron Sayers, from Aaron's Wood'n'Stuff, re-fashioned the pews in the Naval Dockyard over a number of weeks.

"I was working as an office manager, but I took a course in Boathouse 4 in the naval dockyard about traditional boat-crafting and marine construction," said Paul. "I loved working with wood, and if you can build boats, you can build anything! It gave me confidence to quit my office job and do this full-time.

"I met Aaron and we got the job at St Luke's. The navy helped us to take the pews out and we

re-fashioned them in Boathouse 4. Taking a pew apart without damaging it is tricky, as they were held together with Victorian iron nails, many of which were rusty. The wood would splinter easily and there was also 150 years of dirt on them.

"But we managed to make three conference tables out of 12 pews, and then make the coffee bar as well. It was enjoyable, and we've made other items of furniture out of the pews to auction off."

Paul and Aaron hosted that silent auction at St Luke's last month, raising money to help the church's development project.

The £1.5m project to transform St Luke's Church will also involve creating a new entrance and café on the west side of the building, revamping its garden, and providing better facilities for other

community groups. It has been backed by Portsmouth South MP Stephen Morgan, and community groups from across the area.

Worshippers aim to make the church a place of worship, spirituality and rest in an area of the city where people are typically busy and purposeful. They also want to link together students, city centre workers, local residents and shoppers, all of whom use the city centre.

The Host co-working space is open from 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. At the end of the week, the furniture is cleared away and the church prepared for Sunday worship.

For more information about The Host, see: [www.thehost.space](http://www.thehost.space). For more information about St Luke's Church, see: [www.stlukesouthsea.church](http://www.stlukesouthsea.church).