

Bike scheme puts us at heart of community

PORTSMOUTH'S first 'Boris bike' scheme could be hosted in a refurbished church building.

Funding from the national Church will help worshippers to repair and refurbish St Margaret's Church in Eastney. The church is being allocated around £350,000 from the C of E to transform the building.

St Margaret's was closed in 2015 because it was unsafe. Its roof leaked, its windows needed repairing, and there was a danger of plaster falling from the ceiling. Former worshippers held their final service in its church hall in December 2015, as they were unable to use the church building.

Two years later, a new congregation – including 15 core members from nearby St Jude's Church, Southsea – started worshipping regularly in that church hall. That 'church plant' has now grown to around 70 regular worshippers, and it needs more space. They have already invested around £90,000 into some initial work on the church building.

Their vision is that the refurbished St Margaret's Community Church will be at the heart of its local community, with the building being used as a base for social enterprises. This extra funding will allow the church to host a community café, regular activities and youth events.

One of the social enterprises – Bicycle Recycling – has already created a workshop within the church building, where young people are being trained in bike maintenance. Bicycle Recycling is paying for some of the internal



Pioneer minister Fran Carabott (left) with Charlie Adie, managing director of Bicycle Recycling, which will be based inside St Margaret's Church

refurbishment at the church, so it can be used as the operational base for a project to provide 150 loan bikes across the city.

It wants to start a scheme similar to the one created by Boris Johnson when he was Mayor of London, with bikes available at prominent locations across the city. Bikes could be picked up and dropped off at a number of key spots across the city – and brought into St Margaret's Church for repair when needed.

The loan bikes scheme could be launched this Spring.

Charlie Adie, managing director of Bicycle Recycling, said: "We would start off with 15 drop-off points for bikes in the south-west of Portsmouth, including key places like The Hard, the Seafront, Commercial Road and Albert Road.

"We'd have 150 bikes available for people to pick up, make their journey, and leave at the next

New and old ministry could be side-by-side

OUR Bishop's Council is now consulting on plans to reorganise parishes that could pave the way for the creation of new congregations.

The vision includes extra investment in parishes in Gosport, Newport and the Leigh Park estates.

The idea is to create teams of ministers – clergy and lay people – who can plant congregations, inspire discipleship, and bring the good news of Jesus to those who don't yet go to church – as well as maintaining traditional worship.

In Gosport, the proposals are to bring together the parishes of Bridgemary, Elson and Rowner; and to merge the parishes of Forton, Christ Church and Holy

Trinity. Each could have a new team rector and church-planting team vicar.

The PCC of St John's, Forton, have asked for their church to be transformed into a 'mission hub' to serve the whole of Gosport, sharing the Christian faith with those living across the town.

On the Isle of Wight, the parishes of Newport Minster, St John's, Carisbrooke and Barton could form a new team ministry, with a team rector, team vicar and church-planting team vicar – those clergy would be responsible for the parish of Gatcombe.

And in Havant, the vision is that the parishes of Leigh Park, Warren Park and West Leigh form a team ministry with a team

rector and church-planting team vicar. Although all three PCCs had reservations and wanted to retain their current clergy, they could see the advantages of working more closely together to reduce administration and free up time and energy.

In all three areas, new investment could see new pioneer ministers, operations managers, youth ministers and others working alongside traditional parish clergy. It would be partly up to worshippers themselves to work out the ultimate shape of the teams in each new parish.

There are now eight weeks of consultation before the Bishop's Council makes its final recommendation in April.

drop-off point. At any time we might have 10 per cent of the fleet being maintained at our base in the church. We've already created a workshop at the side of the main building, with six workbenches, and we're offering opportunities for young people to learn about bicycle maintenance.

"The partnership with the church works well. We share their values of wanting to serve the local community. It also fits in with our desire to offer employment opportunities and make a difference to the environment by encouraging people to cycle."

And Fran Carabott, who leads St Margaret's Church as its lay pioneer minister, said: "When we started meeting in the church hall in September 2017, there was no way we could use the church itself. There were two big cracks in the wall, and plaster could have fallen from the ceiling onto us. And 100 years of sea breezes on the south-facing windows had disintegrated the stonework around the windows.

"We've already invested some money in repairing the ceiling

and re-felting the roof. This new funding will now help us to create a new worship space, prayer room, kitchen, office space, toilets, and 'hubs' on either side of the church for social enterprises to use. Their rental income will help the church's ongoing costs.

"This will help our vision to make this building at the heart of our local community. We already have a regular fitness session, toddler group, Sunday services and organise a quiz night. This will help us to provide a café, youth work, and give us more space for our expanding congregation."

The national Church of England has allocated £2.1m to projects in our diocese as part of a total allocation of £35m in Strategic Development Funding across the country.

Some of the funding will go towards employing two pioneer ministers at St Luke's in Southsea, to support its work with teenagers and young adults, and on developing working spaces for lone workers. Harbour Church in Portsmouth will also receive support to consolidate its work in two new city congregations,

within St George's, Portsea, and St Alban's, Copnor.

The funding is part of the national Church of England's Renewal and Reform initiative to enlarge congregations, deepen discipleship and enable churches to have a greater impact on their local communities.

The Ven Joanne Grenfell, Archdeacon of Portsdown, said: "I'm particularly impressed that C of E churches throughout the city – which are often very different to each other in the way they choose to worship – are so supportive of each other's visions."

Our diocese originally applied for £4.9m in Strategic Development Funding from the national Church of England, which would contribute towards its £9.65m initiative to revitalise church life across the diocese. On the advice of the national C of E, its bid was split into two. If approved, the second phase of funding would help pay for investment in parishes in Gosport, Newport and the Leigh Park estates. For more details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/strategy.