

IN DEPTH: MISSION-SHAPED BUILDINGS

Now up to 40 volunteers take turns to staff the café four days a week, welcoming dog walkers, ramblers, villagers and families with locally-roasted coffee and home-made cakes.

The chairman of the Friends of Droxford Church, John Symes, said: “The PCC and the Friends had a vision for how different parts of the church building could be used, and how a community-based project could make this a thriving venue.

“We are close to the Wayfarers’ Walk, St Wilfrid’s Way, the South Downs Way and the Meon Valley Trail, and we knew there was no café nearby, so it made sense to provide somewhere for walkers – and also for families whose children paddle in the river.

“We were also conscious that private and public funders would only support the restoration project if there was a coherent business plan that would allow the local community to enjoy the building. So we were never going



Cyclists from Go-Girls Cycling stopping off at Wilfrid's Cafe

to stop with just the restoration work.

“We even worked with the local village hall to ensure that we were providing something that was complementary, not in competition with them. And we created the community interest company, which ensures that any money we make is ploughed back into the community – which

includes the church.

“It means we have welcomed hundreds of people who might never have visited the church otherwise. They can appreciate its beauty, history and spirituality.”

For volunteers such as Sarah Smith, the café is a great opportunity to serve others. She’s one of three operations managers

who help to train others to work the barista machine, organise the rota of cake bakers and ensure Covid safety.

“I was new to the village five years ago, and used to work at Barnaby’s, which is the coffee shop next to St Barnabas, Swanmore,” she said. “But since I’ve started working here, the number of people I know in the village has quadrupled! It’s lovely to see people come in, to chat with them, and to feel part of the community.

“It really has breathed new life into the whole area. So many people come past who don’t happen to live in Droxford, but will feel welcomed here.”

Sarah’s son Connor has already worked in the café as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, and there is also the possibility of giving work experience to those who might otherwise find it difficult to find jobs.

Wilfrid’s Café is currently open on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10am-12.30pm. For details, see: www.wilfrids.org.

For information about the overall project, see: www.friendsofdroxfordchurch.org.uk.



Adults can chat over coffee and cake while their children play in the soft play area at St Margaret’s Community Church in Southsea

Cafe and soft play area put church at heart of community

EXCITED families welcomed the opening of a new community café and soft play area inside a Portsmouth church.

Eager children raced into the new soft play area in St Margaret’s Community Church, Southsea, as the ribbon was cut to mark its official opening. They careered down slides, bounced around oversized balls, and ran around with balloons.

It came just a couple of weeks after the official opening of their brand new coffee shop, which is serving tea, coffee, cake and hot food at reasonable prices. As you enter the refurbished church, it now contains the café and community shop to the left of the worship area, and the Foodbank and soft play area to the right.

The Foodbank has been open throughout the pandemic, collecting thousands of food donations and distributing them to needy families. The community shop aims to sell second-hand clothes, shoes, furniture and ornaments at affordable prices, to serve local residents.

It caps a remarkable transformation for the Church of England church in Highland Road. In 2015, its existing congregation decided to stop meeting for worship, partly because major refurbishment of the church

building would be so expensive.

In 2017, a small group from nearby St Jude’s Church started meeting for prayer and worship in the neighbouring church hall. Their vision to transform the building to be a hub for the local community attracted some funding and enabled them to move back into the church building in 2019.

The official opening of the soft play area at the end of June marked the end of a major development that has included re-roofing the church, refurbishing the inside, and installing heating and a new floor.

Amie Jenrick, whose children Rudi, aged five, and Milo, 18 months, were among the first to sample the soft play area, said: “My youngest has never actually seen a soft play area before, because of the pandemic, so he was very excited. It’s a nice place to come, because you can sit in the café and see the whole thing, so you can keep an eye on your children.”

The church’s Foodbank is open two mornings a week, its café and community shop are open from 10am to 2pm on Thursdays and Fridays, and the soft play area (including cafe) is open from 2:30pm to 4:30pm on Thursdays and Fridays. Each soft play session costs only £3 per child.

How annexes can open up new possibilities

A NUMBER of our churches have built annexes as a way of providing facilities that allow greater use of the building.

St Mary’s Church in Hayling Island completed the creation of ‘the Lantern’ in 2019, which includes a small meeting room, toilets and a kitchen. It hosts a lip-reading class, and there are plans to use it for coffee mornings and an after-school eco-churchyard club.

Nearby St Peter’s Church in Hayling had previously created ‘the Ark’, which allows space



The Lantern, the annexe to St Mary’s Church, Hayling Island

for refreshments after services and concerts, and allows the church to hold craft fairs and social events. It will host a craft

stall made out of recycled products to coincide with the launch of all-age eco-services.

St Paul’s Church in

Sarisbury Green built an extension which was completed in 2017 because there wasn’t enough space in the church itself to host all its activities.

Its large and small halls, kitchen and toilets have been used by its mums and toddlers’ group, Thursday Café, and Encompass group for the elderly - the latter two will restart in September.

It has also hosted a Scalextric group, Alpha and similar courses, and the kitchen has been used to prepare refreshments on a Sunday.