

Name of project/group
Outreach Post Office in Empingham Methodist Church, Rutland
Type of project
Social Action\Opening up Public Services
Location
Empingham, East Midlands
What was involved
<p>Empingham is a small village of about 800 people in the County of Rutland. The church is unlisted, but is in Empingham Conservation Area and at the centre of the Stamford & Rutland Methodist Circuit.</p> <p>At a church council meeting in 2002, the members considered the future of the church. Rather than stand still and face the possibility of further deterioration of the building and the likelihood of closure, the membership embarked upon an ambitious scheme involving complete refurbishment of the premises. After much dedicated hard work the vision became a reality and the refurbishment was completed by Christmas 2005. A major part of the outreach and mission was the establishment, in 2003, of a satellite community Post Office open Monday afternoons when refreshments and Fair-trade produce are also on sale. This has proved very popular and successful.</p> <p><i>How the project got started</i></p> <p>A church member who was also a County Councillor had conducted a Village Appraisal which identified that one of the main needs was for a post office. The church was encouraged to start to raise the funds for the refurbishment scheme that was needed to open up the building for community projects. They also persuaded the Post Office Ltd to run a satellite Post office. Having the Post Office housed in the church helped raise awareness of the project and raise funds to carry out the whole scheme.</p> <p>The church consulted architects, building specialists and sought advice from damp technicians. They also liaised with the Rural Community Council. Being part of their Local & Parish Council, meant that the church had an understanding of local development processes and was part of local networks. They were also in contact with the National Rural Officer for the Methodist Church based at the Arthur Rank Centre, who gave support and encouragement. The main partners in developing and implementing the project were the District of the Methodist Church, the Stamford and Rutland Circuit.</p> <p><i>The main sources of funding</i></p> <p>Large grants came from the Stamford and Rutland Methodist Circuit & District funds. Many smaller grants came from various like minded organisations. The remainder was a combination of donations from church members, and much local fund raising.</p> <p>The project cost £220,000. This covered a complete re-roofing and insulation and damp proofing. A new kitchen and toilets were built including disabled facilities and baby change. The pews were replaced by chairs. Disabled access was created inside and out with appropriate doors etc. The whole building was redecorated throughout and new carpeting laid down. A separate grant of £3,000 enabled a Community Office to be set up in the vestry which is now a combined office and vestry.</p>
Achievements
Refurbishing the church and making it more user-friendly gave the opportunity to bring people into the building making them feel comfortable and welcomed. Members have developed skills

in applying for grants and working with various outside bodies.

The income from outside bodies using the church premises as a community resource has contributed to the maintenance and sustainability of the building. There are lots of people coming into the church for various activities throughout the week. A normal week involves:

- *Monday*: Pilates Group in the morning. Post Office & Community Office including Fair Trade goods and refreshments on sale in the afternoon.
- *Tuesday*: Church based prayer & bible study group.
- *Wednesday*: All day - Day Centre run by Age Concern.
- *Thursday*: Toddler Group run by church members.
- *Friday*: from time to time, Supper evenings for Church members and friends.
- *Saturday*: Fund raising - Study days - Quiet Days - Circuit events.
- *Sunday*: Church services - generally the membership has remained much the same.



Future plans

The church is looking to replace the present heating system with a more energy efficient system.

The church is exploring through their circuit how they can encourage more support for small congregations. One idea is to employ a Rural Missioner employed by Stamford & Rutland Circuit to help the smaller congregations such as Empingham and to encourage the ongoing work and find new ways of working together.



Lessons Learnt
<i>Be optimistic:</i> The church considers that the main lesson of the project is how much could be achieved given the relatively small number of members involved (less than 20).
<i>Encourage membership engagement:</i> It is felt that increasing the number of committed Church members would also be helpful to sustain the amount of volunteer time and effort work required.
Project contact
http://empingham-methodist-church.org.uk/

May 2011

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