



LIVING OUT A VISION IN A UNIQUE POSITION

A YEAR IN OUR LIFE

April 2011 to March 2012



A Report from the Strand Church and the Strand Centre, Dawlish

INTRODUCTION

A year of seeking grants

In the past year both the Strand Church and the Strand Centre have spent time and money searching for grants to implement the building plans which the Synod has approved.

By common consent

- it is one of the hardest times to seek grants in the past four decades
- continued low interest rates have reduced the amount of money which private grant making bodies have received in income, and this is obviously reflected in what they have available for grants
- public bodies, and particularly the Big Lottery, have had to provide huge amounts for the preparations for the Olympic Games. When we prepared our plans in 2008, we confidently expected to apply for a grant of between £250,000 and £300,000. The *maximum* grant now available from the Big Lottery is £50,000.

Many public bodies now only consider grants applications to the poorest postcodes in the country. Though Dawlish is the fourth most deprived community in Devon (including Plymouth) it is not now eligible for grants from these bodies.

We have purchased the two Directories of Grant Making Bodies, and two members have worked through every one of the thousands listed to identify the ones for which we might be eligible. Not one of them is currently giving more than around £25,000, and many of them are granting significantly less.

The only possible grant of over £50,000 which we discovered in the whole year was from CommunityBuilders, which part of the Social Investment Enterprise Fund, did offer grants of £150,000 and we applied. We got through the first three rounds and were then eliminated possibly because the Strand Community Trust had not been in existence for three years. We probably spent nearly £6,000 in making this application.

During this year we learned three key lessons about grant applications

1. The information required for making an application to statutory grant making bodies is so large, so detailed and so technical that it has to be made by someone with very considerable expertise in applications. In our case this has meant having to employ a grant consultant. Applying for grants is professional and expensive business!

2. All the advice we have been given is that in these straightened times, even to get into the running, those applying for grants need to know at least one of the trustees who can commend the application so that it gets serious consideration. We held a Strand Dinner in June 2011 hosted by HM Lord Lieutenant of Devon to which we invited two major local wealthy individuals and the local great and good (including the MP, leaders and chairs of the County and District Councils, local councillors, head teachers, the two local peers etc) with Dawlish Community College supplying their own delicious sweets and serving a table. We hoped to make contacts with "those who know those who are trustees". So far this has had little success.

3. We are caught in an expensive dilemma. To fulfil the approved plans, it is necessary first to lower the floor (obviously this cannot be done after other work has been done based on the existing floor level) and to level and extend the gallery, which is essential to provide toilets and kitchen. These will be sited under the gallery extension. Our architect and quantity surveyor, in consultation with a builder chosen after a tender process, has costed this at around £210,000, with a basic no-frills and no non-essential finishing work at £165,000. (This is why we were so hopeful for the £150,000 CommunityBuilders grant.) If this basic work can be done, evidence suggests that it will be comparatively easy to raise money for the remaining discreet work because possible donors will be able literally to see what their giving can achieve.

A year of working with the Strand Community Trust

The Strand Church Meeting invited the Strand Community Trust to manage the building on the same basis as will apply when the lease of the building to the Trust is finalised. So now the congregation hires space for its worship and meetings but pays nothing towards maintenance and minor repairs. It was anticipated that this would be roughly financially neutral (ie the saving on running costs was balanced by the rent paid).

This year has provided both the congregation and the Centre with a period of learning how it will work when the lease is signed. We now have a tried and tested operating system.

A large number of essential administrative issues have been sorted out, including insurance (which includes who is responsible for which contents in the building) and VAT (which the Centre will now be able to reclaim for building work). The Centre has worked out policies for everything from lettings to coping with vulnerable adults.

A year without pews

A year ago we used almost all our capital reserves to pay for the removal of the pews to provide the space we now have. In making our initial application for ecclesiastical exemption permission, we know many doubted whether our vision was realistic and attainable. 2011 enabled us to see if this was true. We look at it under three headings.

1. THE RENEWAL OF THE CONGREGATION

In the past year

- The congregation has become more relaxed and members have come closer together. This happened physically when we were in the hall for three months for our services. Now the evidence is that more people are staying longer after the service to enjoy coffee together around the tables at the foyer end of the church.
- After the pews were removed, one long standing member returned to her Anglican roots because “the building does not feel like a church” and two others have drifted. However numbers have been sustained despite 2 deaths and 4 regular worshippers becoming housebound, so newcomers are arriving and staying, though none is yet ready for the commitment of becoming a member.
- We now have more informality and variety in our worship. This includes bi-monthly café worship and a Hot Cross Bun Service on Good Friday which attracted families who do not normally come to our services.
- Because the building is open far more than it used to be, more people “just come into have a look”. More are now coming in for coffee and there is always an elder to have conversation with them.
- Removing the pews meant having to relocate the prayer corner to a less advantageous place, so it has been used less apart from when there is an event in the building. Then we get a several prayer requests. Roughly two candles are lit each day. It suggests that when the easily accessible street chapel is in available, it will be well used.
- We have had the opportunity to share the gospel in new ways. We have held two week long events – a Flower Festival during Carnival Week with a theme relating to our community work and a five day Festival of Nativity sets before Christmas. On both occasions church members have been available for conversation and to serve refreshments.
- We now have more social events to keep the congregation together.
- These changes have been symbolised by
 - ❖ changing our name to The Strand Church partly in recognition that the term “United Reformed Church” means little to people who have no church connection; but mainly to give geographical identity to the congregation.
 - ❖ a new logo. Our first logo was an outline of the church spire, intended to identify our work with the most prominent architectural feature in Dawlish. But now we want to emphasise people, so the new logo places have people dancing round the spire shown in our old logo.
 - ❖ moving from the strap line “The Church with the spire” to “The church at the centre of Dawlish”.

2. THE STRAND CENTRE: OPENING TO THE WORLD

There is no doubt that the vast majority of comments received from Dawlish people have been favourable to our building alterations and to the vision of the Centre and the congregation. The local councils have recognised this with grants of £12,500 from Devon County Council, two of £900 and £300 from Teignbridge District Council and one of £300 from Dawlish Town Council.

Use of the building has increased exponentially in the last year

Community consultations (mostly with exhibitions) (none held before)

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|------------------------------|---|
| Devon County Council | 2 |
| Teignbridge District Council | 3 |
| Town Council | 1 |
| Chamber of Trade | 2 |

Community Information

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|------------------------------|---|
| Ecological heating displays | 1 |
| Well Living Day consultation | 1 |

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| Concerts | 16 | up from 4 |
| Fayres | 6 | up from 1 (inc 2 used by other churches) |
| Table Top Sales | 16 | up from none |
| Art Exhibitions | 4 | up from 1 |
| Charity sales of various sorts | 10 | up from 3 |

In all, during this year the Centre has been used to raise about £15,000 for charitable causes, and the number of users is growing.

As a consequence of this openness, Sainsbury's provided £125 worth of food for our annual Christmas Day lunch and other organisations contributed around £300. The number of non-church volunteers has also increased.

3. THE STRAND CENTRE: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY

Community care

In the last twelve months the Centre, with very considerable help from members of the congregation, has started

- 2 luncheon clubs. They are clubs because we want to encourage people to come every week, to make friends and to support one another.
- 3 coffee mornings each week, each with a separate theme – live music, free daily newspapers, parents & toddlers. We now have standard hot snacks and drinks menus at uniform prices, so people know on each visit what they are getting and at what cost.

- to screen special events on live television such as the Royal Wedding and Wimbledon; and we will cover the Jubilee and the Olympic Games. Each event has its own special refreshment relating to the event. This provides an alcohol free, family friendly opportunity to share special occasions with friends.
- talks with other community support groups about their using our facilities for their projects.

Partnerships

One of our key objectives is to build partnerships with different groups. No two partnerships will be the same. Each is shaped for mutual support and encouragement. At the moment there are partnerships with:

- The Third Age Group which no longer has exclusive use of the top floor of the Strand Hall. This has brought it much more into the life of the Centre and we hope that this will enable the Third Age Group to build up its membership which in turn will be a source of volunteers for the Centre
- The local Cancer Research group runs a sale and coffee morning each Wednesday and it holds three special fairs during the year. Our partnership with Cancer Research has led us to revive the Dawlish Violet Ball. (From the twenties to mid-fifties, Dawlish produced vast numbers of violets, so many in fact that special trains took them direct to London. The violet season ended with a Violet Ball and one of the surviving Violet Queens worships with us and is advising us.) Cancer Research is managing the publicity and some of the catering and using its extensive network to sell tickets. We anticipate Sainsbury's will sponsor the event and local winegrowers will provide some of the liquid refreshments. This partnership increases Cancer Research's involvement in the Centre and relieves our volunteers. Incidentally the Community College is again supplying the sweets for the buffet and the waiters and waitresses.
- Another partner is Oakwood Court College which is a residential educational establishment for physically and mentally handicapped youngsters. Each of the pupils has a one-to-one carer. The College runs a weekly Coffee Morning, one of the weekly Luncheon Clubs and a weekly afternoon Cream Teas. Two or three students work with staff on each venture, providing the pupils with an opportunity to interact with local people, something that is not often available to them. It is moving to see the transformation in the lives of some of these youngsters, and to receive the great gratitude of their parents. We hope to develop this work further.
- The next partnership to be established is with Volunteering in Health, a local non-statutory charity set up to integrate volunteering support for the hospitals and medical practices in Teignmouth and Dawlish. This locally funded experimental charity is pioneering part of Devon County Council's plan for integrating Health and Social Care services. Volunteering in Health plans to open an office in The Strand Centre, and to run a number of new caring groups (eg a Memory Café and a support group for carers under the age of 21).