

History of the Windmill Centre

Phase 1 Early 1980s

On 31 March 1981, the Parish Council (PC) called an open meeting to discuss Oxfordshire County Council (OCC's) offer to let or sell the former Windmill Secondary School (except the strip of land fronting Hempton Road) to the PC for use as a community centre and playing fields. As a result a committee was formed, the Windmill Management Committee (WMC), representing the interested voluntary organisations (mainly youth organisations).

This committee was asked to investigate the need for such facilities, and on 21 April 1981 it reported to the PC that there was indeed a real need, and that they were willing to manage the centre. The PC agreed to the proposal and provided £2,000 to cover the initial costs.

OCC then sold the strip of land at the front of the site to Rockwell Development, with planning permission for eight houses, and let the remainder of the school site with four derelict classrooms and a four-acre playing field at the rear to the PC for £1700pa rent.

With the aid of a loan obtained by the Windmill Management Committee (WMC) from the Sports Council, the tennis courts were reconstructed. This loan was paid off by annual contributions from the new Tennis Club; and the playing field was brought into use for cricket. The classrooms were derelict and vandalised, but were repaired sufficiently to be used by local groups.

Rockwell realised that they had little chance of selling their new houses with such an eyesore within view, so they offered to demolish three of the four classrooms and refurbish the fourth so that it would look presentable from their site. The view of the WMC was that would leave them with insufficient room and suggested to Rockwell that perhaps they could build a new centre in exchange for an increase in the site for housing (now Mill Close and Murdoch Close).

Rockwell were prepared to consider this so the Parish Council set up a working group (chaired by Rob Forsyth, with Richard Broadbent and Mary Robinson, then chair of the PC) to negotiate with Rockwell. The working group negotiated a proposal with Rockwell which they then recommended to the PC.

Richard Broadbent, Mary Robinson and, far right, Robert Forsyth, who comprised the Financial Working Group, together with Wallie Walliker, MD of Rockwell Development, at the opening of the Windmill Centre in 1986



In 1984 the Parish Council bought the site from OCC: as sitting tenants they were able to negotiate a favourable price: £21,500. The new hall opened for use in January 1986 (see Appendix 1 for a plan of the site).

Phase 2 Late 1980s

In 1985, however, Rockwell had taken out an option to buy the adjoining field, and suggested Phase 2 which would extend the housing over the original playing field and allow them to construct a new playing field to the west. Complex negotiations continued between the developer, the working group, OCC and the District Valuer (acting on behalf of the Parish Council at the recommendation of the District Auditor). Some Parish residents were concerned at the way the land was being valued and their concerns were put to the District Valuer. The deal was complicated by issues of access and covenants.

The end result was a six-acre playing field, now used by football, cricket, bowls, etc., three tennis courts, and the sum of £777,000 in the PC's bank account. The BBC contributed £4,500 to the Parish for use of the village centre in the filming of *Blott on the Landscape* which, the Chair requested, should be earmarked for the Windmill Centre.

The PC recognised that some of the funds would be needed to develop more facilities on the site, and to maintain and improve the building. However, the District Auditor determined that the WMC could not be given the money as they had no official standing, as the charity had not been set up at that time. The PC did not set up a separate Windmill fund, but rather administered the funds as part of their general accounts.

From the very beginning it had always been the intention for the WMC to apply for charitable status to manage the centre. This was granted in 1988 and the Management Committee continued to carry out the day-to-day operation, only now within the trust.

In May 1989 the PC called a public meeting and a ballot to decide on how the capital sum should be used. There were 652 ballot papers, representing 48 per cent of the electorate. The consensus was for some capital to be spent on improving the Windmill, and the remainder to be held for future generations.

The 1990s

In 1990, the PC set up a Parish of Deddington Trust, a committee of six trustees whose job it was to administer the fund. Three parishioners were elected by a parish poll and they were joined by three Parish Councillors. The trustees met several times to consider applications for funds from various organisations but, in January 1991, the Department of the Environment decreed that the trust was illegal and consent to the transfer of money to this trust was unlikely to be given. So the money had to stay with the Parish Council.

The presence of the capital in the bank, with the high interest rates at the time up to 15 per cent meant that the PC did not need to raise a precept for the years 1992–96 and had a reduced precept for the years 1996–2000. Over **£500,000 is still invested**, although in 2018, the returns are negligible.

Over the decade, the building was extended to provide a viewing area on the west side, and the bar which had been constantly vandalised was removed. The main hall was extended to provide a stage; the kitchen and Parish Council office were added; the roof was insulated, and car park lighting installed. Outside, the bowling green, all-weather pitch and sports pavilions were added. These were paid for by the Parish Council from the capital sum.

Wind Turbine 2008

The Management Committee spent two years investigating the possibility of installing a wind turbine on the western edge of the playing field. You can find out more in [Windmill Community Centre, Wind Turbine Project, Presentation to the Parish Meeting, 20 May 2008](#). It was clear afterwards that residents of nearby Mill Close were opposed to the project and the next six months were spent trying to meet their concerns. A planning application was submitted to Cherwell DC in December 2008, but the number of unconvinced objectors meant that the PC withdrew their support, the WMC withdrew the application and the project foundered.

Solar Panels 2011

With the aim of providing the Centre with electricity from a renewable source, so reducing dependence on ever more expensive fossil fuels and lessening our carbon footprint, in March 2009 further research was undertaken on photovoltaic solar panels on the south-facing roof. Planning permission was given for this but an application for grant aid to cover the £55,000 capital cost was unsuccessful. In 2011 the PC decided to pay for solar panels itself: the feed-in tariffs available at the time made it a worthwhile investment of PC funds.

Teen Scene Equipment 2008

A multi-use games area (MUGA), an aerial skateboard and a multi-pod were installed thanks to a £20,000 grant from Cherwell DC and £8000 from the PC.

CCTV Cameras 2008

CCTV cameras were installed in an effort to curb ever increasing vandalism. They are linked to a hard disk recorder which gives many hours viewing. The local Police carry out frequent, random sweeps at the Centre and are aware of known trouble-makers. The main trouble spot is the all-weather court where attacks on the fencing are extensive and involve the use of bolt cutters. The trespassers not only cut the fencing but leave the surface covered in litter, inconveniencing users and proving costly to put right.

2015

The PC allocated £40,000 for refurbishment projects such as: double glazing windows, updated toilets; new boiler and heaters in the committee room and upstairs room; redecoration inside and out; new windows on three sides and new doors; LED lights in the main hall (dimnable LED) from a TOE2 grant via the PC