

# History of the Windmill Centre, Deddington

*Mary Robinson*

*with thanks to:*

*Rob Forsyth and Richard Broadbent for checking historical detail*

*David Rogers and Helen Oldfield for checking PC finances*

*Sue Ayles and Vaughan Jones from the current*

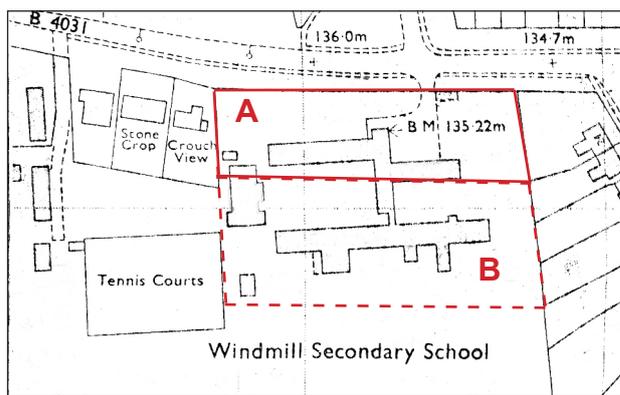
*Windmill Management Committee*

*Prepared for Deddington Parish Council*

*June 2020*

## Phase 1 Early 1980s

The Windmill Secondary Modern School on the Hempton Road had closed in September 1971 when the Warriner Comprehensive opened in Bloxham. Some of the buildings continued to be used for heavy craft and domestic science for a short time after that. In December 1979 Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) first came to the Parish Council (PC) with a proposal to sell or let the old buildings and playing fields for use as a community centre. The options were to buy at £15,500 or take a 3-year lease at £100pa and buy at market value on the termination of the lease. The offer to buy wasn't taken up but, in April 1980, the PC were granted planning permission to demolish the school hall and erect a new sports and social hall.



*OS map of the Windmill School site*

In March 1981, OCC sold the strip of land fronting Hempton Road (marked A on the site plan, *left*) and including some of the old school buildings to Rockwell Development with planning permission for eight houses. At about the same time it let the remainder of the school site (marked B on the site plan) with four classrooms and a four-acre playing field at the south to the PC for £1700pa rent for 60 years.

For many years Deddington had been looking for a site for a community centre, and although this wasn't in the village centre as some residents had hoped would happen, this was an opportunity not to be missed.

The old hall had been in use for youth group meetings and adult education classes for some time, so the PC investigated whether it could become a viable community centre. In March 1981 a 14-member Windmill Management Committee (WMC) was formed under the chairmanship of Richard Broadbent, to represent all the interested voluntary organisations. Their brief was to investigate the need for a community centre, and to assess whether the remaining classrooms could be used. They were willing to manage the Centre, so the PC agreed to the lease and to provide £2,000 to make the old buildings usable. They were in a derelict state with over 200 broken windows, and much initial repair and decorating work had to be done to get the Centre up and running.

Rockwell then realised that they had little chance of selling their new houses with the eyesore of the old school buildings within view, so they offered to demolish three classrooms and refurbish the fourth. The WMC felt that would leave them with insufficient room and suggested to Rockwell that they build a new centre in

exchange for increased land for housing, taking the number of homes from eight to 26. Rockwell liked the idea, so the PC set up a working group, chaired by Rob Forsyth, with Richard Broadbent and Mary Robinson, then chair of the PC, to negotiate with Rockwell.



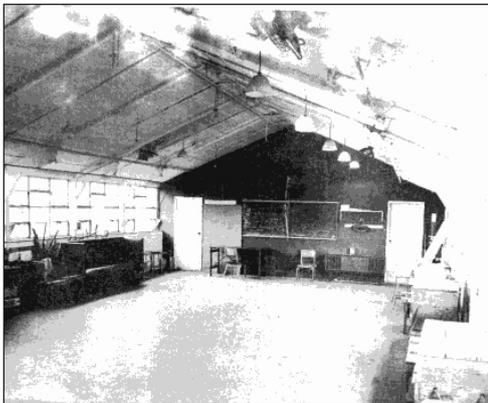
*Derelict tennis courts*



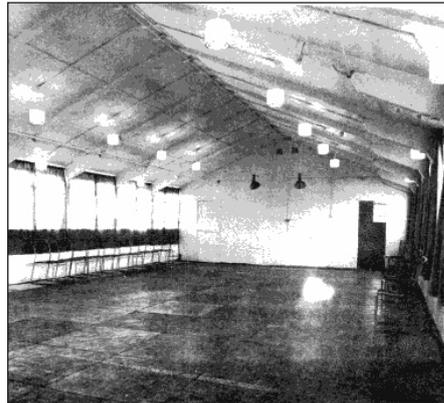
*Old playing fields*

In parallel, a newly formed Tennis Club had applied through the WMC to the Sports Council for a grant to do up the derelict tennis courts. They asked OCC for a long lease as required by the Sports Council – and the suggestion came back that the PC buy the Windmill site rather than leasing. The Sports Council loan was granted and was repaid in 1988.

The PC realised the Centre could actually happen and, in December 1981, it suggested to OCC that it should buy all or part of the site. As sitting tenants they were able to negotiate a favourable price of £21,500. Not all councillors were in favour; some saw the building as a white elephant that would never be used and



*One of the empty classrooms ...*



*... with a portable dance floor*



*Old radiators ready for sale*



*The Windmill Community Centre is up and running*

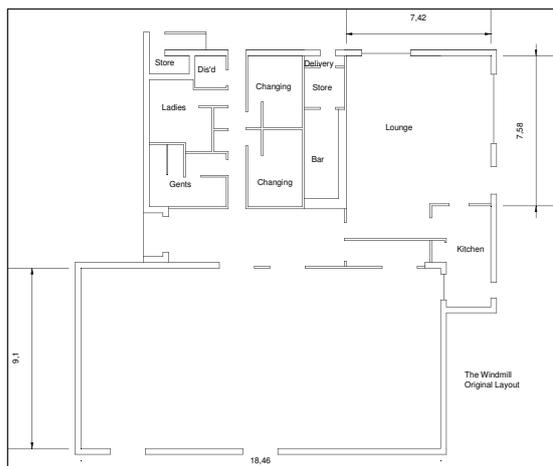
would only drain the PC's reserves. After much robust discussion at a special meeting in July 1982, approval was given for the purchase by eight votes to four, and the conveyance was signed on 2 September. The PC took out a 10-year loan from Cherwell District Council (CDC) to fund this.



*Artist's impression of the new building*

The original plan for the building ran into problems as structural engineers raised concerns about the stability of the very high hall walls. Internal buttressing was proposed which would have made the hall too small to play badminton. This led to a change of architect, and instead a steel-framed building with brick infilling was designed. The redesign was completed in May 1984.

Rockwell bought part B of the site, and started work on building the Windmill Centre in January 1985. It was to be walk-in and usable but not finished.



*Original floor plan and build*



## Phase 2 Late 1980s

In 1985, Rockwell had taken out an option to buy the adjoining field to the west (commonly known as the Potato Field). They suggested Phase 2 which would extend the housing again over the original playing field to create Mill Close and Murdock Close, and in return the PC would have a six-acre playing field instead of four. In September 1988 the PC bought the field for £110,000. Complex negotiations continued between the developer, the working group, OCC and the

District Valuer. He was an HMRC official acting on behalf of the Parish Council at the recommendation of the District Auditor, the externally appointed government financial auditor.

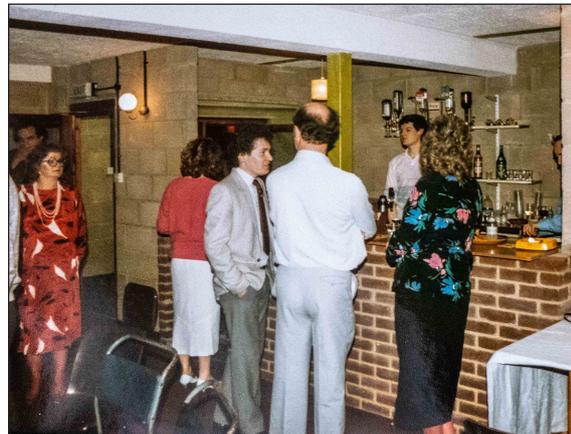
Some parish residents were concerned at the value put on the land being sold to Rockwell, and their concerns were put to the PC. The District Valuer had valued the land at £400,000, which was low, based on Rockwell having the only access through Mill Close. The group successfully applied for planning permission for access to the land via the present Windmill driveway, and so the District Valuer increased his valuation. Legal proceedings were started against the PC, but nothing further happened.<sup>1,2</sup>



*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*

After much consultation with sports field consultants, the playing field was brought into use for cricket, as well as football. It had the reputation of being the best square and worst outfield in the county! Deddington Town Football Club resisted playing there at first as their traditional home had been the Castle Grounds.

The end result was a purpose-built Community Centre building, and the sum of £770,000 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 new hall opened for use in January 1986.



*Lounge bar in the original layout*

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<sup>1</sup> Much more detail of the wrangling over the initial set-up of the Windmill in the 1980s can be found in the pages of early issues of *Deddington News*. The old Gestetner-printed pages are not easy to read, but the information is there for the record. PC Minutes from May 1982 are also available on their website. Older Minutes are available from OCC's Archive at St. Luke's in Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> The relevant Land Registry documents are:

ON 345993 (99-year lease from Deddington PC to the WMC, December 1987)

ON 114122 (area of WMC lease from the PC, 1988)

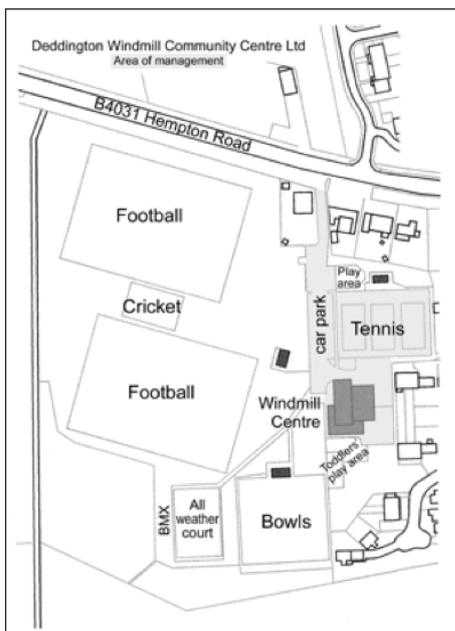
ON113023 (purchase of 6-acre playing field, 1988)

ON125011 (transfer of a strip of land in Mill Close from Wilcon Homes to the PC to access services, 1989)

ON196776 (PC purchase of land for under-6 play area, now the Pocket Park, 1989)

ON 156214 (purchase of land for bowling green, copse and path between playing field and cemetery, 1993)

The Centre had originally intended to face playing fields on the east, but now had them on the west, so changing rooms and the viewing lounge were on the wrong side.



In 1988, a Lease and Deed of Covenant was signed by the Parish Council and the First Trustees of the Windmill Community Centre, whereby the trustees leased and managed the community centre for a period of 99 years for £10pa. (This figure was later reduced to £1pa for VAT reasons.) The schematic (*left*) shows the area managed by the Windmill Management Committee, including the centre building and car park around it, the tennis courts, and the access road. The sports field and play areas remained the responsibility of the Parish Council.

The PC recognised that some of the funds would be needed to develop the facilities and to maintain and improve the building. However, the District Auditor determined that the money could not be given to the WMC as it had no official standing – the charity had not been set up at that time. Rather than ringfencing a separate Windmill fund within its accounts, they became part of the Parish Council's general capital account.

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 charitable trust. Later, in 2003, the Deddington Windmill Community Centre Ltd, a company limited by guarantee, was formed and the charity trustees became directors of the company.

In May 1989 the PC called a public meeting and a ballot to decide on how the capital sum should be used. 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 with a committee of six trustees (three parishioners elected by a parish poll and three Parish Councillors) to administer the capital funds. The trustees met several times but, in January 1991, the Department of the Environment said the trust was illegal and consent to the transfer of money to the trust was unlikely to be given. So the funds stayed with the Parish Council.



In 1992 major refurbishment plans were drawn up to extend the building to provide a sports viewing lounge 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, land for the bowling green was acquired for £12,790. The bowling green, the three pavilions for the Cricket, Tennis and Bowls Clubs, and the all-weather pitch were constructed at a cost of £147,000. The £373,254 total cost of these extensions came from the PC's capital reserves.

### **Teen Scene Equipment, 2008**

In 2008 a multi-use games area, an aerial skateboard and a multi-pod were installed thanks to a £20,000 grant from Cherwell District Council and £8,000 from the PC.



### **CCTV Cameras, 2008**

CCTV cameras, linked to a hard disk recorder, were installed in an effort to curb ever increasing vandalism. The local police carried out frequent, random sweeps at the Centre and were aware of known trouble-makers. The main trouble spot was the all-weather court where attacks on the fencing were frequent and expensive to repair.

### **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. Residents of nearby Mill Close opposed 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 stopped.

## Hall Plans, 2010

The Windmill Management Committee drew up a phased plan of development that would have included doubling the size of the main hall with a closable partition; new shower and toilets; a new viewing lounge with a bar and accommodation for an onsite steward/caretaker/booking clerk. The impetus for the plan came from the Badminton Club who were keen to have another court. The plan was shelved because of the economic climate.

## Solar Panels, 2011

As the wind turbine project had ground to a halt, there was still a need to provide the Centre with electricity from a renewable source, so reducing dependence on fossil fuels and lessening the Centre's carbon footprint, in March 2009 research was done on photovoltaic solar panels for the south-facing roof. Planning permission was given 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 the investment of PC funds worthwhile, and since then it has provided over £5000pa income.

## 2015

By now, nearly 30 years had elapsed since the Windmill was built, and it was beginning to show its age. A Parish Questionnaire was held, an early consultation process for the Neighbourhood Plan. And it was pretty savage in its criticisms of the Windmill – both the Centre building and outside play facilities.

The PC had guarded the capital afforded by the Rockwell deal in their coffers for many years. For a time it provided up to 15 per cent interest, so the PC had no need to raise a precept in 1992–96 and had a reduced precept for the years 1996–2000. Over £500,000 still remained, but now returns were negligible and the PC had an asset that was suffering through lack of investment.

### **SAMPLE COMMENTS FROM THE PARISH QUESTIONNAIRE, 2015**

Playground very out of date – truly awful ...:

Terrible playground ...

Playground very poor compared to some other villages ...

Needs a major refurbishment ...

Centre need updating, it's shabby and grubby!

Needs some money spending on it!

Building needs modernisation ...

Building looks tired and needs to be made more attractive for social hiring purposes, not just for an indoor sports facility

## Major Improvements 2017–20

In May 2017 the PC set up a Development Group under the chairmanship of Mary Robinson. It comprised Parish Councillors, members of the Management Committee and representatives of the sports clubs. Its brief was simple: make the Windmill a better place. Over the years a rolling programme of redecoration, refurbishment and improvements had been carried out by the Management Committee from its letting income. Capital projects had been funded by the PC on an ad hoc basis, but now the PC was prepared to invest some of its remaining capital reserves to preserve its asset.

Between 2016 and 2020 major capital projects amounting to nearly £90,000 were mainly funded by the PC: a new gas boiler, heaters and radiators, new doors and replacement double-glazed windows, LED lighting, and a wooden floor in the upstairs studio. The paved car park was extended on the east and south to provide extra parking space and a future recharging point for electric vehicles. An updated CCTV system was installed, both inside and outside the building, one which can more easily be monitored from a desktop computer. Funding for some of these projects was aided by Section 106 money on the back of new housing developments in the parish.



*The recently installed wooden floor in the upstairs studio will attract new dance and fitness groups*

In the Windmill Park, new facilities brought dramatic improvements: in 2017 a fitness trail around the perimeter of the playing field; new vandal-proof fencing and LED lights for the all-weather court; and on the redundant BMX track, an open access multi-use games facility (MUGA) for kids to kick a ball around (and vandalism to the all-weather court stopped ...).



*New fencing and LED floodlights at the all-weather court (l) and new multi-use games area (r)*

The Tennis Club obtained planning permission for floodlights on two of the three courts which enabled them to play in the evenings three nights a week up to 9.30pm.



The Bowls Club had closed due to a lack of members and, in 2019, a children’s adventure playground with zip wire, traditional swings, and wheelchair friendly roundabout, etc. was created on the former bowling green, extending in a woodland trail through the nearby copse. The £120,000 project was made possible thanks to a very generous £50,000 grant from a local resident, fund matched by the PC and topped up by Oxfordshire County Council.

And lastly, thanks to a £25,000 government grant, the old and tired under-6 children’s play area became a natural Pocket Park, with a timber climbing structure, shelter, willow tunnel and play panels.



*The timber multi-play structure and woodland trail play pieces*



Dogs were banned in the play areas and on the playing field, much to the disquiet of many dog-owners. A dog-walking path was laid out round the perimeter of the site. It didn't stop the dog poo on the playing fields but helped protect the children's play areas.



*Multi-play structure and timber shelter in the Pocket Park*



Also in 2019 the lease between the Parish Council and the Windmill Management Committee was redrawn to reflect the fact that the WMC had become a limited company some years previously.

In this period, nearly £250,000 was spent by the Parish Council on improvements to the Windmill's sports and play facilities, of which only about a third came from the PC's own funds, the rest being grant aided by organisations (Government MHCLG, Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council/Section 106 funds, Awards for All, and local sponsorship and grants). We are immensely grateful to them all.



Plans for an extension to the building to provide a high-spec function room to replace the oddly shaped viewing lounge, bar and new kitchen were started, costed and then stopped, when it became apparent that the likely outlay would be upwards of £500,000. Much grant aid and fund-raising would be needed to get going again.

One anticipated improvement still on the cards was the provision of new disabled toilets and an outside access toilet on the western side of the building. And



*New illuminated signage flags up the much improved facilities at the Windmill*

£25,000 was still ringfenced to refurbish the existing toilet block, and £40,000 to repair/replace the roof which leaked badly in the rain.

At the time of writing (June 2020), the Windmill, along with its play parks, is closed and future plans on hold because of the Covid-19 pandemic. As the lockdown began to ease, ways were being found to open the grounds and the building again safely. In 2020 (pre-Covid) the list of users is extensive.

Despite a very difficult start, the Parish Council and the Management Committee have worked together over the years to create a community centre that benefits Deddington residents and beyond.

In 2020 the Windmill Centre has a highly organised set-up with the Management Committee working in partnership with the PC. Budgets are now agreed annually so the rolling programme of improvements and refurbishment can continue into the future, financed by both the Parish Council and the Management Committee. £421,000 is still held in the PC's capital reserves, with £330,000 held in their revenue reserves.

## **WINDMILL CENTRE USERS**

### ***Regular users include:***

Parish Council  
Day Care Centre  
*Deddington News*  
Cherwell District Council (polling station)  
Football Clubs (adult, vets and colts)  
Cricket Club  
Tennis Club

### ***Regular activities include:***

Badminton  
Annual pantomime  
School theatrical productions  
Pilates  
Yoga  
Modern dance  
Fitness groups  
Mums & tots  
Uniform groups – scouts, guides, etc.  
Zumba  
Dog training  
Go karting  
Baby massage  
Mum & baby fitness  
Netball  
5-aside football  
Diabetic eye screening

### ***Ad hoc users pa***

45 (2019)





**play join in  
relax hire**

### About the Windmill

*The Windmill plays a vital Community role in the Parish of Deddington.*

It is a hub for many sports, interest groups and clubs, a place to meet, socialise, keep fit, learn something new or simply relax. It is also a fantastically flexible venue available for hire for one-off events and regular bookings by people both near and far.

The Windmill wants to grow to match the needs of a growing and evolving community. There is a proactive Working Group in place and the Windmill is run by a core committee of six volunteers, with support from a wider committee of club and society organisers.

**Friends of the Windmill**  
If you would like to volunteer your time, skills or help in any way we would love to hear from you. Please contact our Bookings Secretary with your details and we will be in touch.



**Contact us**

Julie Gibbs  
(Bookings Secretary)  
**07720 834006**

enquiries@thewindmilldeddington.org

[www.thewindmilldeddington.org](http://www.thewindmilldeddington.org)

 @theWindmillDeddington

tennis • yoga • football  
dance • badminton  
keep fit • cricket • netball  
playground • performances  
panto • celebrations  
meetings • parties

[www.thewindmilldeddington.org](http://www.thewindmilldeddington.org)





**Hire**

*The Windmill is the ideal place to hold your event, group, meeting, sport or activity.*

<p><b>Main Hall</b> <i>Ideal for:</i> Parties, indoor sports, performances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large hatch to kitchen, wipe clean floor, stage, badminton court lines, doors to Hempton Lounge</li> <li>• Ground floor, 19 x 9m, up to 200 people</li> </ul>	<p><b>Clifton Room</b> <i>Ideal for:</i> Small meetings and events or as a green room for performances on the Main Hall stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural light, hard-wearing floor, a cosy space</li> <li>• Ground floor, 8.4 x 3.9m, up to 20 people</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hempton Lounge</b> <i>Ideal for:</i> Young children's parties, small presentations, reception area for events in Main Hall.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of natural light, doors onto lawn, ramped entrance, flexible seating</li> <li>• Ground floor, 14.5 x 4m, up to 50 people</li> </ul>	<p><b>Deddington Studio</b> <i>Ideal for:</i> Dance, yoga or uniformed/ youth group meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Light and airy space, carpeted flooring, hatch to galley kitchen, toilet on this floor.</li> <li>• First floor (not suitable for special access requirements), up to 40 people</li> </ul>

**All Weather Court**  
Recently refurbished with improved surface, new fencing and new LED lighting. 36x23m sports court. Available to hire for football, netball, tennis and other ball games.

**Clubs and Groups**  
*The Windmill is host to a large number of clubs and societies.*

Whether you're into sports, dance, hobbies or you want activities for your children, you'll find something to entertain you both inside and outside the Windmill. Visit our *Clubs and Groups* area of our website and see what you and your family could discover at the Windmill.

**Play**  
*There so much space at the Windmill.*

With extensive playing fields, playgrounds, tennis courts, an all-weather court, a brand new multi-use games area and a fitness trail you're spoilt for choice.

**See you soon  
at the Windmill!**

**How to book a room or the all-weather court**  
Go to [www.thewindmilldeddington.org](http://www.thewindmilldeddington.org) to book online or contact the Bookings Secretary, Julie Gibbs on 07720 834006

