

St. Peters Community Centre

1. The Story So Far

The new St. Peters Community Centre was built and opened in 2019. It replaced the old St. Peters Hall, next to St. Peters Church on Coronation Avenue Westfield, which had been a community hall for Westfield since the 1960s.

The Centre is designed to provide both a variety of spaces for hire, and as a drop in and community hub which can be open to the public. It has 3 spaces for hire – a large hall, a meeting room for 10-15, and a small meeting room for gatherings of 2-6. At the heart of the Centre is an open plan café and seating area, with a small lending library. A fully equipped catering kitchen opens both into the café and the main hall. The Centre is equipped with underfloor heating and Wifi throughout, and a high standard of accessibility.



Westfield as a neighbourhood is home to 5,000 people, 2 clusters of shops, and a secondary school. The centre of the estate includes the most deprived area in South Somerset, identified by the 2011 census and subsequent surveys as in the 10% most deprived areas in the UK. The most acute areas of deprivation are in child poverty and education levels, but Westfield also experiences levels of poor health, crime, long term illness, and anti social behaviour which are 50% higher than the Yeovil average.

The Centre was built to help tackle issues of deprivation and local need, and we are starting to see the fruits of that. For example:

- Use of the Centre by a Job Club, Citizens Advice, Health Visitors and community midwives, providing much more accessible support services for local people
- Having the Centre open 5 mornings a week through use of volunteers, with regular community cafes and activities on 3 of these.
- New groups set up by local residents, including a knitting group and a parent-led baby group.
- Library use in Westfield is among the lowest in the county. Working with Somerset County Libraries, we have established a community library, accessible to centre users without needing to sign up for library membership. This is very popular and is well used.
- The Centre was used exclusively by Yeovil community midwives during the covid lockdown, giving them a safe space to operate, and keeping the Centre in use.



St. Peters Community Centre was built by a partnership of St. Peters Church, Westfield Community Association, Yarlington Housing Group (now Abri) and South Somerset District Council. The Centre opens directly into St. Peters Church, which can also be available for hire, or as an annexe to the Centre. Nothing is permitted in the centre which conflicts with the core values of the partner organisations.



2. Vision, Goals and Objectives

St Peters Community Centre exists for the benefit of the wider Westfield community. It was built with the following objectives:

- To provide high quality and accessible community facilities for Westfield.
- To create opportunity; providing a base for outreach services which provide advice, training and support relevant to local need. This includes literacy skills, youth services, IT skills, poverty, food poverty, health and wellbeing. The Centre is proactive in engaging partners and providers who can address these issues. Our goal is to reduce social and economic deprivation in Westfield.
- To provide a base for the community work of Westfield Community Association and St. Peters Church.
- To provide the local community with spaces for hire, and an informal, welcoming meeting space for people to drop in.



Values - The new community centre is for the well-being of the community in which it is centred. It will be managed efficiently and fairly without discrimination towards any individuals or groups as defined by the Equalities Act 2010. We specifically seek to promote activities which:

- Help develop a sense of community
- Help people in hardship
- Tackle loneliness
- Promote wellbeing, life skills and resilience
- Support positive youth activities
- Involve residents as volunteers, leaders and participants.
- Bring people together and develop a feeling of pride about the Westfield area.



3. Where We Are Now.

Covid and the first lockdown came 6 months after we first opened. All the regular groups and activities stopped, but we were approached by the local community midwife team, and they have been based at the centre for 2 years now, using our small meeting room 5 days a week. All our previous users, and some new ones, have now returned, and the Centre is in use 7 days a week by 20 different groups and organisations. A volunteer rota means we can open the Centre every weekday morning.

The Centre broke even financially in 2021, on a turnover of nearly £35,000, with the help of £6,000 of covid recovery grants. We are in the process of acquiring a lease at peppercorn rent of some nearby land to use as a community car park, as parking for centre use is an increasing challenge. Finances are managed by a superb volunteer treasurer.



Setting up a new community centre from scratch has been a big task, but we now have established policies and procedures for operation and maintenance, and the Centre is well used. However, we recognise that there is still work to do in making local people aware of what the Centre offers, and in developing the Centre as a resource in response to local need.

We have taken out a 50 year lease, at a peppercorn rent, on a nearby piece of land, to develop it as a Centre car park. All planning permissions and surveys are in place, and we have some funding towards this.

4. Management, Staffing and Partnerships

St. Peters Community Centre is overseen by a Management Committee consisting of representatives from the partner organisations (St. Peters Church, Westfield Community Association, Abri Housing Group) and user groups. The leadership and operational management of the Centre is the responsibility of the Centre Manager, with the support of the Management Committee. The post has scope to grow as the work of the Centre grows.

The Centre currently employs a part-time cleaner and a part-time caretaker. There are a number of volunteers involved in the Centre, including a bookings administrator and treasurer.

We work with a number of partner organisations and agencies. The following partners currently deliver services in the Centre.

- Somerset County Libraries
- Citizens Advice South Somerset
- Health Coaches (Ryalls Park GP surgery)
- As well as Abri Housing

The Centre Manager takes the lead in strategically engaging with partners who can help us deliver our objectives. We are seeking to build closer partnerships both locally in Westfield (Westfield Academy and Westfield Co-op) and to engage with other agencies (e.g. Somerset Skills & Learning, Age UK Somerset, Yeovil College, Somerset & Avon Police). Centre volunteers are available to be points of contact and communication, so a team approach is encouraged.

The Centre stands on land owned by the Church of England, and is legally owned by the local CofE parish. However it is run under delegated powers from the church council, as a community centre rather than as a 'church hall', and the Centre management has full operational and financial independence.

