

Attracting external funding for community projects

THE CHALLENGE

The people of Fairford are justly proud of their heritage and the town's rich history is evident in a range of buildings.

The jewel in the crown is St Mary's Church to which thousands of visitors beat a path every year to see its complete set of mediaeval stained glass windows.

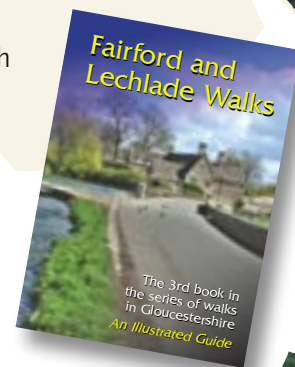
Next door is a Grade 2-listed 18th Century building which was originally the town's Farmor's School, before being used as a Youth and Community Centre.

A study carried out in the late 1990s by Fairford Town Council into the needs of residents, businesses and visitors identified strong support for the premises to be purchased so that they could be used to deliver services to the local community.

The building was put up for sale by Gloucestershire County Council shortly afterwards and, fearing that it would be snapped up by a private developer, the Town Council and St Mary's Parochial Church Council jointly negotiated to buy it. The sale was completed in November 2002 at a discounted price of £192,000.

Volunteers helped to give the town's new Community Centre a quick facelift ready for its official re-opening in March 2003 but, given its state of disrepair, it became clear that more than £1 million would be needed to renovate it and bring it up to modern day standards.

Fund raising had to begin in earnest to bring in the money necessary to refurbish the building. The aim was to create an up-to-date multi-use Community Centre with modern facilities for meetings, small business conferences, parties, space for young people, community activities and other events and a "one stop shop" to provide information for local people. In order to maximise use, the Centre would also provide a heritage centre, home for the town archive, a visitor centre for the church and Council chamber and offices for the Town Council.





DEVELOPING THE IDEA

Fairford Town Council (FTC) joined forces with the St Mary's parochial church council, which already owned the rear of the old Farmor's School, to secure the building for community use. FTC took out a low cost loan from the **Public Works Loan Board** to cover its £144,000 share of the purchase price and raised its precept to cover the repayments.

A six-member project team, made up of representatives from the Town Council and the church, was brought together to oversee renovations, maintenance and security and to apply for funding.

Both FTC and the church embarked on major campaigns to raise money for the renovations; the council encouraged local people to make donations to a **Golden Jubilee Appeal** while the church secured the support of several charitable trusts. Their combined efforts raised more than £300,000.

But the project team set its sights on the **Heritage Lottery Fund** (HLF) to secure the lion's share of the money it needed.

At the same time a **limited company managed by a board of trustees** – Fairford Community Centre Limited - was set up to manage the letting of the building. The company was set up by volunteers, some of whom had business backgrounds, with the assistance of local solicitor Simon Mumford of Wilmot & Co.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

A year after the official purchase of the Community Centre's in November 2002, the project team secured a £37,800 **Project Planning grant** from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This was a double boost as it meant money would be available to pay professionals to plan and develop the work and it gave the project more credibility which meant it was more likely to be considered a sound proposition by a national funding body.

To fulfil the terms of the grant, the team worked with officers from Cotswold District Council (CDC) and architects Reg Ellis and Associates of Chipping Campden to put together a Conservation plan. These architects also drew up an access plan to ensure the project fully met the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and increase access in other areas. A more local firm had initially been employed to do this work but over time the project team formed the opinion that that it probably did not have the background or experience to support a Heritage Lottery application and, after paying that company's fees, consulted widely to find a firm with extensive experience of conservation and heritage work.



Professor Tim Copeland of the International Centre for Heritage Education at the University of Gloucestershire was brought in as a paid consultant to assist in putting together an Audience Development Plan. His idea to hold a **Heritage Drop-In Day** to demonstrate the Centre's value as a community venue and to encourage people of all ages and walks of life to embrace the project proved to be an outstanding success. It attracted more than 400 visitors in just one day and a second drop-in day was held five months later.

Planning permission and listed building consent for the renovation of the Centre was later granted by CDC and in December 2005, HLF announced an award of almost £700,000. The plans included a new block at the rear of the existing Community Centre to provide essential facilities and a new Council/Conference chamber. Part of this was considered a community gain and not eligible for Heritage funding, so further finance was needed. A successful application was made to the **Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance** initiative. This is an £8 million programme to support the rural economy, which is managed by Gloucestershire First (the public/private partnership steering the county's economy), with half the £8 million coming from the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). The project team had to provide a comprehensive application and business plan that demonstrated the Centre would boost the rural economy and improve delivery and access to services, and was awarded £180,306. Further grants and local donations increased the total raised to over £1 million.

Fairford Community Centre Ltd managed to cover its expenses within its first year, even though only limited space was available, and, since the re-opening, has remained in profit with the support of the townspeople.

As at Spring 2007, work is currently underway on the extension to the Centre and renovations are due to start soon. A grand opening ceremony is planned for the first half of 2008.

KEEPING IT GOING

Efforts to bring in funding to renovate the Community Centre have resulted in a number of spin-offs:

- A **Fairford Archive** is to be housed in the Centre to reflect the wealth of memories and artefacts in the town which came to light as a consequence of the first heritage drop-in day. The archive is managed by the **Fairford History Society** which was also formed as a result of the heritage events and now hosts regular historical meetings, produces publications and runs a website at www.fairfordhistory.org.uk.
- Organisations making use of the Community Centre include Cirencester College and the University of the Third Age, which means the building's original purpose as a **place of education** is being maintained. Other users include CDC's Rural Cinema, Fairford Town Council, various community activities and local businesses.



- A community play telling the story of education in Fairford through three centuries has been produced. The £25,500 cost of the play has been funded through the **Local Heritage Initiative** and a video of the production will be placed in the archive.
- Tables and chairs, power point presentation equipment and a hearing loop have been purchased for FCC using Development Funding from the **Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum** to increase the Centre's appeal to organisations looking to book rooms.
- Plans are being drawn up for part of the Community Centre to serve as a visitor centre, providing facilities for the 14,000-plus people who visit St Mary's Church each year. Eventually, the Centre will be run as a business venture with a full-time member of staff.
- A new Book of Walks around Fairford and neighbouring Lechlade is to be promoted and sold through the Heritage Centre. The book, based on a similar publication for Newent, was produced by the action group Fairford Forward with advice from the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum. It is hoped that the book, funded by a £5,000 grant from the Aggregates Levy Fund, will encourage visitors to spend more time in the town, and in turn support local businesses. Routes include the new "heritage trail" which is to be complemented by a set of plaques, funding sources for which are still being explored.

TOP TIPS

- **Be hard working and focussed:** Funds for projects such as Fairford Community Centre are not "easy money". In the words of Fairford's Mayor Chris Roberts: "You're always going to meet hurdles throughout the process of applying for grants. Expect setbacks, stay focussed, stay positive and just see your goal at the end of the process and keep that goal in mind."
- **Be prepared for a long haul:** Fairford's £1 million Community Centre project is now into its seventh year. The best way to cope with projects that extend over several years is to deal with them in "bite-sized chunks".
- **Put together a strong team that will see the project through to its completion:** Ideally with one person who will make the project their number one priority and keep it moving forward. Fairford's Community Centre project team includes some people with finance and construction backgrounds, but the most important attributes are determination and the ability to deal with detailed paperwork. Funders look for evidence that project teams are efficient managers, good communicators and will deliver what they promise.
- **Know your facts:** Gather together as much evidence as possible, including estimates for labour and materials, before applying for grants.



- **Make your project as wide as possible and bring in other organisations:** The benefits of the partnership between Fairford Town Council and St Mary's Church extend far beyond the additional fundraising capacity that comes from two organisations joining forces. The planned visitor centre within the Community Centre is likely to add to Fairford's overall appeal, to the benefit of the church and traders in the town.
- **Engage local people:** Carry out public consultations before starting a project so that applications for grants are backed up with evidence of need.
- **Employ the right professional advisors with experience of the project you want to do:** The HLF's project planning grant covered the fees involved in getting the right sort of advice and professional help needed to put together a fully prepared and costed project. This will show funding organisations that projects are deliverable, demonstrate what they will achieve and provide a realistic estimate of the costs involved.
- **Spread your net:** When applying for grants, explore as many funding avenues as possible and match your aims to what various funding organisations are looking to achieve. If necessary, apply to more than one organisation. In Fairford's case, the HLF agreed to fund work to preserve and conserve the old part of the Community Centre but would only pay for part of the new building work, so a community activity funder was needed.
- **Push the right buttons:** Before applying for grants, read the aims and priorities of funding bodies very carefully and consider adapting your project if necessary to give the funders what they want. In Fairford's case, both the heritage content and economic aspects of the project were increased to strengthen the applications. When filling out forms, emphasise the points that meet the funders' specific objectives. Remember they are looking for good projects, good plans and good people in order to meet their desired outcomes.
- **Don't be afraid of the wider vision:** It does no harm to mention wider outcomes in an application, such as benefits to the local economy and social cohesion, even if these cannot be measured.
- **Take advice from funding bodies:** Approach organisations early on and work closely with their grant advisory officers. After taking advice from the GRCC, the Fairford Community Centre project team successfully increased its bid for Rural Renaissance funding from £100,000 to £150,000 and then £180,306!
- **Work with local businesses:** In Fairford a local security company installed closed circuit television cameras to the Community Centre.



CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Fairford Town Council

Tel: 01285 712344 • E-mail: fairford@cotswoldwireless.co.uk

www.fairford-tc.co.uk

Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum

Tel: 01452 425953 • E-mail: daniel.judges@gloucestershire.gov.uk

www.town2town.org.uk

Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance scheme

Tel: 01452 427768/425676/425573

E-mail: thriving.communities@gloucestershire.gov.uk

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ruralrenaissance

Gloucestershire Rural Community Council

Tel: 01452 528491

www.grcc.org.uk

Market and Coastal Towns Association

www.mcti.org.uk

South West Regional Development Agency

www.southwestrda.org.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund

www.hlf.org.uk

Local Heritage Initiative

www.lhi.org.uk

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Each case study presents:

- the **initial challenge** or issue faced by the town
- how a **solution** was developed
- how it was **rolled out**
- how it is being **sustained**
- **top tips** – useful information and advice to other communities which may be facing similar issues
- **contact details** to help you find out more