

Name of project/group
Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
Type of project
Social Action
Location
Reading, South East
What was involved
<p>The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus has been a Polish Church in Reading for over thirty years, since it took over a former Church of England church, St John the Evangelist, which was threatened with closure and conversion into flats. It is grade II and in the Eldon Square Conservation Area.</p> <p>The church is well-attended by the approximately 10,000 strong Polish community in Reading, a section of the population that is made up of both Poles and those of Polish descent who came as refugees following the Second World War, and more recent migrants. It holds 10 services a week and on average 600 attend the main day of worship.</p> <p>The project is to repair and restore this church which has fallen into bad state of repair. This project has been led by the Chair of the Church Council who has worked fund-raising and providing the leadership during the required effort over the last five years.</p> <p>The church also owns two other properties. One is a hall which is managed by and for the Polish community as the Polish Social Club, now called <i>Piwnica</i>, and which was recently refurbished and re-opened last year. The other is used as classrooms for the Polish School and accommodation for the Parish Priest. Other parts of the properties are rented out to long-term tenants who are Polish migrants. All these uses bring in income streams which help with the on-going maintenance of the church.</p>
Achievements
<p>In 2006, the Church Council, decided to renovate the external courtyard and to renovate the interior of the hall. It was then realised that the church itself was in very poor condition and that that should become the priority. However, the Church had no experience of running a major building project, nor where to find funding.</p> <p>The Church had no idea where to start and literally began by looking in the Yellow Pages. The Church found English Heritage to be extremely helpful and they have provided inspiration, technical expertise, advice on funding sources and choosing an architect and most importantly grants.</p> <p>The Church now has several stable sources of income stream including the rental income from let-out accommodation and the Social Club. Being close to Reading town centre, they also rent out parking places.</p> <p>This will enable them to maintain the church building in the future as well as repay the £100K loan they were given by the Polish Catholic Mission to help fund the urgent works to the tower.</p>
Future plans
<p>The Church is currently celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Polish Parish, so with the increased events that are being organised they hope to enhance their restoration funds.</p> <p>It is expected that the works to the tower and spire will be completed in 2012. The next phase will be the renovation of the hall, the interior of the church and then the courtyard.</p>

Lessons Learnt

The Church felt that the fact it started with a blank slate acted as an impetus to the project. They consider that starting with no money and no knowledge of how to take such a project forward has meant the project has been a good learning experience, which has engaged many people who have offered advice and help. Another lesson is that it is important to involve a cross-section of people from the beginning.

Project contact

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