

**CASE STUDY: St George's Church, Portsea**

St George's is a Georgian building with a dilapidated Victorian church hall added on at the back.

Built by shipwrights in 1753, the church itself is the oldest and most durable community facility in Portsea. It was already re-thinking how its worship and outreach needed to change in the light of an increasingly diverse community and the impact of Admiralty Quarter and Gunwharf Quays developments.

The challenge was to take a fresh look at how best to use the inside of the historic church and re-develop the hall – to ensure it remains the worshipping hub of Portsea and could be used more widely by the community.

Interns drew up four different options for the redevelopment of the hall. Each involved demolishing all or part of the existing hall to reveal the historic rear elevation of the church itself.

They drew on the naval heritage of the area for an idea that involved creating flexible, colourful spaces using shipping containers, which could be brightly lit at night. Another idea involved creating a courtyard, which would include plants, trees and green walls growing around a space that was open to the public.

A third idea involved building a smaller, dedicated 'translucent' chapel behind the church to cater for church activity and reflection. And the fourth meant redeveloping the existing church to include an open space that could be used for corporate dining and weddings with a new chapel.

Ideas for uses of the main church included banquets, rock and classical concerts, a climbing wall (pictured right), a roller disco and a temporary art gallery.

The ideas were showcased at an open day to which members of the local community were invited. Worshipper Eric



Eric Symonds looks at a model of the shipping container idea with Samir Lariko

Symonds, who lives in Gunwharf Quays, said: "It's an incredible building, and we must keep it. But if we can use it for functions, weddings, concerts and so on, so much the better. I think the shipping container idea is very functional, but I like option 4 best."

And Sandra Gibbs, headteacher of St George's C of E Primary School, said: "I like the idea of an open space, as I think it will be calming. We bring the children here for a service once a week, and they know this place as somewhere they can talk about faith."

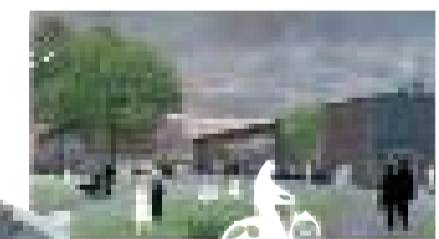
For details of the work at St George's, see [www.stgeorgesportsea.org](http://www.stgeorgesportsea.org)

**CASE STUDY: St Francis Church, Leigh Park**

The idea is to help make St Francis Church into the creative hub of Leigh Park. The 'Heart of the Park' proposals aim to restore the church to the geographical centre of the community.

Ideas include the landscaping of the site around the church, the opening up of its crypt for youth activities – and replacing the existing community room with a new building. The 1960s church is positioned in the centre of a green area and next to a stream, which makes it easier to develop its grounds for community use.

Some of the ideas were generated after a 'design charrette' earlier this year, when



postgraduates were given a day to think of radical proposals for the church. Other ideas were developed by Norwegian students on an exchange programme.

"There is a lot of potential on this site," said Leigh Rampton. "The existing church is beautiful and there is a lot of opportunity in a growing Leigh Park. Leigh Park is very green and this need to be shown off, and there are increasing numbers of both older people and younger people, especially young families."

"St Francis has a unique modern history and it is about meeting the original aims of being the centre of the community. The idea of the heart of the park is bringing everything together and make a coherent offer that is attractive to local people. There is strong potential to develop this into a social enterprise to make this work."

**IMAGINE you had a professional consultant and a bunch of eager interns – all dedicated to helping your parish realise its vision.**

They could create radical designs showing how your building could be transformed, examine your finances and work out how your parish could earn extra income, hold open meetings so you could consult with your local community – and design professional-looking publicity to share your vision with others.

That's exactly what is beginning to happen with seven parishes in our diocese that have signed up for the Rapid Parish Development Programme. It's a programme that is unique to our diocese – but is now set to be shared with others in the Church of England.

It uses a social business model to help parishes think about how to make the most of their assets, use their buildings creatively and engage better with their communities. The idea is to encourage worshippers to think "out of the box" and dream up innovative ways of reaching their communities.

The parishes that have signed up include St George's, Portsea, St Francis, Leigh Park, St Columba, Fareham, St Mary's, Rowner, St Peter's and St Luke's in Somers Town and All Saints, Portsmouth.

All are in fast-changing, disadvantaged areas and all were anxious to think of radical ways to help them be more effective in their work. The latest parish planning to join the programme – St Faith's, Havant – aims to be at the heart of the town community.

The programme has been jointly developed by our diocese's Council for Social Responsibility and consultant Leigh Rampton, whose organisation is called 'rimu'. It involves two workshops with parish teams and PCCs, and a wider presentation to the whole parish.

The project culminates with a document that outlines the rationale for development, which can be used to gain funding, engage local

THIS might be the new look for St Mary's Church, Rowner, in the future.

It's one of four possible options drawn up by intern architects as part of the Rapid Parish Development programme as a way of improving its facilities.

A church has stood on this site for more than 1,300 years, but the population of Rowner only exploded in the 1960s when the current estate was built by the Ministry of Defence. A huge extension to the church was designed and consecrated in 1968. In May 1990, a fire destroyed the new extension – although the old church survived miraculously. The extension was rebuilt and consecrated in 1992.

Now the church is seeking to reach and engage what is a very young local population. It also wants to offer an inspiring,

**CASE STUDY: St Mary's, Rowner**

welcoming and flexible space, to improve its landscaping and improve the leisure provision, especially for young people.

The options drawn up by the interns include a 'loft' extension above the existing church hall. There could be large curved open-

ings and balconies that would be more visually welcoming and inviting. It could be combined with a new pathway with robust seating to encourage people to meet and spend time in the church grounds.

Another option involves creat-

ing a new performance square in front of the church. There could also be a new lych gate, made out of two vertical pieces of stone, and it could be linked to the performance square via a narrow channel of water.

A third design involves removing the existing hall and replacing it with an open-plan 'public square' area. Different spaces would cater for different activities, and the floors of each space would be styled in a different bright colour.

And the fourth involves an eco-refurbishment scheme, which could aim for self-sufficiency in energy. It could include passive and renewable heating and cooling and super-insulated buildings to minimise the building's carbon footprint.

The church unveiled the ideas to the public at a neighbourhood

conference at the end of October.

The rector, the Rev John Draper, said: "The designs were all inspiring and stimulating, and have provoked many comments. We have to come up with a scheme which will enable passers-by to notice that we are a thriving and busy church and community centre. At the moment, because we are well back from the road, it is sometimes hard to recognise that fact."

"What we hope to achieve, taking ideas from each of the designs, is a purpose-built extension, open from 8am to 10am, for the use of local children and young people and their families, and we are grateful to the Rapid Parish Development programme for helping us in our thoughts and decisions."

For more details, see: [www.stmarysrowner.org](http://www.stmarysrowner.org)



Leigh Rampton with interns (left to right) Matthew Ingham, Jon Newlyn, Steve Pirks, Rosie Turner, Verity Rees and Khalid Saleh at the University of Portsmouth's architecture department already lost two generations by doing so.

"The parishes have really embraced the need to consider more radical options," said Leigh. "For me, the relevant quote is the one from Einstein that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. The Church of England has

you might imagine, because they know what they're doing at the moment isn't necessarily working and they are up for focussing on how to grow not on just survival.

"All our communities have changed radically over the past two decades. The wider culture has changed too, with new technology and new ideas about time, services

and expectations about life. My challenge to churches is to ask if they have fundamentally rethought what they offer in that time?"

Some of the participating parishes worked alongside the architecture department of the University of Portsmouth. The project to transform St Francis, Leigh Park, was part of last year's postgraduate course and provided valuable real-life experience for them. Eight architecture students also worked as interns for six weeks this autumn on designs for improved community spaces in St Francis, St Mary's, Rowner and St George's, Portsea.

Intern Rosie Turner said: "It's been good to get involved with real-life projects. It's been interesting to see what kind of designs the churches are thinking of going with. It's been surprising how radical they are prepared to be."

And colleague Khalid Saleh said: "There is a lot of potential in these church buildings that are not currently being used. The church people know they could be used for more, but don't necessarily know how. If we were working for a consultancy, we'd have to be more reserved with our ideas, but in this situation we can be more whimsical."

The involvement of university

**frequently-asked questions**

**Why do churches have pews - and why are some churches getting rid of them?**

Many people would be surprised to hear that churches didn't usually have permanent pews before the Protestant Reformation.

In the Middle Ages, people stood in the empty nave, and the space could be used for other activities during the week. Orthodox churches still don't have pews.

The rise of the sermon, especially in Protestant church worship, made the pew more important. Some pews were paid for by individual worshippers, and only they could sit there. Many of the early ones were 'box pews', which meant when worshippers sat, only the tops of their heads could be seen. Today's pews often

date from Victorian times and offer less privacy to worshippers.

Many churches have replaced pews with modern chairs that are more comfortable. The disadvantage of these is that it's more difficult for worshippers to squeeze together when churches are packed.

The advantage is that it allows more flexibility in the main nave area of churches – the chairs can be rearranged for concerts or meetings, or removed completely if the building is used for other community activities.

**Have you got a question about the diocese you'd like us to answer in Pompey Chimes? Contact us on [neil.pugmire@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:neil.pugmire@portsmouth.anglican.org) or 023-9289 9673 and we'll do our best to help!**

students has been funded by the South East Coastal Communities project, which uses government cash to help regenerate deprived coastal communities in Kent, Sussex and Hampshire.

Diocesan social responsibility adviser Canon Nick Ralph said: "Rapid Parish Development originally came out of our diocese's Kairos initiative.

Lots of parishes wanted to do something with their buildings, but weren't quite sure where to turn. Leigh Rampton happened to be working in Portsmouth already and had 10 years experience with regeneration and development in London.

"It takes parishes on a rapid journey from what their vision is, to what they can offer to their communities, how they can market that offer and how they can involve their local community.

"The parish will have several potential designs, each of which they can take forward, and – more importantly – will have raised aspirations and generated excitement about what is possible."

Each of the parishes involved so far has paid a contribution towards the consultancy work.

Any parish that wants further information can contact Nick Ralph on 023-9289 9674 or [nick.ralph@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:nick.ralph@portsmouth.anglican.org).