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Description automatically generatedFriends of Droxford Church

AGM Talk on The Role of FODC

It’s good modern practice to learn about the source of any information being imparted. In 2020, I was made a Trustee of FODC, I have been a director of Wilfrid’s Café, I still am a barista and team lead being responsible for the café during my shift, and finally I am the Tower Captain of Droxford bellringers.

The role of FODC is not obvious as we are not very visible.

The word church is in our charity name, but we are not the Parochial Church Council who have the responsibility for providing religious services and as a consequence have the responsibility for maintaining the building. The PCC are thus very visible.

Wilfrid’s Café is even more visible with many volunteers and customers most days of the week.

However, FODC have very little physical presence compared to the PCC or Wilfrid’s Café. To amplify on why that situation exists, lets reflect on the recent history.

No funds flow from the Diocese and the PCC must rely on donations to maintain the building, but these had not kept pace with need. The building was heading for the “at risk” register and if so, would have been closed permanently.

FODC was set up to try and find a way to save the building.

Nearly 650K was raised. Let’s just pause and reflect on that. In the 2021 consensus the population of Droxford was 685. That’s nearly £1K per person! An incredible achievement.

Those funds enabled urgent maintenance work to be done, and the annexe to be built. Looking around today, I think we can comfortably say our aim to try and find a way to save the building was clearly achieved.

As part of the funds being raised, South Downs National Park had a requirement that there be public access to the toilets being provided in the Annexe. There was a vision for a permanent heritage display; not just any heritage display but our heritage. Heritage Lottery also gave money on the condition that the church would be self-sustaining in the future. Accordingly, a café was proposed together with the community room (the screened off area behind the glass) for all sorts of community purposes.

A licence was signed between the PCC and FODC giving access to the annexe, and the community room. In turn, FODC gave a sub-licence to the community interest company which runs Wilfrid’s Café. FODC is the fulcrum between the more visible partners, namely the PCC and Wilfrid’s café but without FODC maximum benefit would not accrue to Droxford.

For example, the presence of the three organisations, the PCC, FODC and Wilfrid’s café have enabled maximum funds to be raised from those outside Droxford. Many organisations, National Lottery etc, will not grant funds to PCCs but will to a registered charity such as FODC. Hence, FODC were able to raise over £650K. During Covid, Winchester County Council gave funds to compensate businesses from closing in lockdown; hence Wilfrid’s café received £10K in compensation which would not have been available to the PCC nor FODC. In a similar vein, in the recent energy crisis, the Diocese gave money to PCCs to support the extra cost of heating and provide warm spaces. Those funds would not have been available to FODC nor Wilfrid’s.

So, whilst not as visible, FODC is a secular charity sharing the building, whilst supporting it’s purpose as a place of worship. We do this through supporting the PCC to maintain the building; especially for enhancements such as the proposed AV upgrade, providing local heritage resources and improving the lives of Droxford residents by arranging activities to improve our community.

Hence our 3 objectives of building, heritage and community.

Let’s look at how we are approaching this since the completion of the building works and the opening of Wilfrid’s café in 2020. We have, of course, our strategy plan, drawn up after extensive consultation. Following which we adopted five values, namely transparency, inclusion, love, enthusiasm and community.

Primarily to fulfil our strategy, we need to raise funds. We do this by regular donations but just as significantly with fund raising events. Those events are also our future heritage and fall within our object of providing community activities.

Our community objective is exactly the same, word for word, as that of Wilfrid’s café. However, by supporting the community, we do not give money but rather we arrange events and seek to make connections between the various groups around the church.

Those groups include the spiritual, those communities involved with maintenance such as the churchyard gardeners, the cleaners, etc, the flower arrangers, the school and pre-school, the bellringers, Wilfrid’s café, the choir and any other community in and around Droxford.

None of these communities occur in isolation and often overlap with many people being a member of more than one community. Obviously, FODC don’t own any of these communities but rather seek to support, cherish and foster, to the benefit of the whole of Droxford. And that is the role we are stepping into to foster the communities around Droxford whilst raising funds.

For example, FODC support the resurgence of our bellringing band. That has led to a Droxford church service of 70 or more. Whilst attending, some of the bellringers were drawn to investigate the heritage display and obviously sample delicious cakes and coffee from Wilfrid’s café. Conversely customers of Wilfrid’s café, when the bells were being rung, have been curious and want to learn bellringing.

The following kind words of thanks were recently received following a visit by the Southern Ladies Guild of Bellringers

“I have had a large number of emails from ladies that came on the ringing outing saying how much they enjoyed the day. They particularly mentioned Wilfrid's cafe with such lovely coffee, cakes and service to start our day off so well; and many had not rung on anticlockwise bells so found Droxford a novel experience. We have never had so many on a Ladies Guild outing. So many thanks for all your organisation to make Droxford so welcoming.”

Obviously FODC make no claim to the bellringing community but through that community there are stronger connections with the heritage community, Wilfrid’s and the spiritual.

In another way, through our heritage display and FODC events, it’s gratifying to see so many from outside of Droxford visit. Whilst for those of us who are regularly in the church, the heritage display and our D Day connection can seem somewhat old news. However, we regularly have international visitors to review our unique D Day heritage. When organising D Day events, we had attendees from all over including Basingstoke, the New Forest and Brighton. It’s amazing how much interest there is in WW2, D Day and disused railways; especially those with a Churchill connection!

Needless to say, those visitors when they visit sample coffee and cakes from Wilfrid’s if it’s open. When working as the barista, I often see people coming into the church for some quiet reflective time nurturing their spiritual needs.

Once again, seeking to foster communities to see beyond their own particular one to the benefit of all with synergistic effect. Sir Keir Starmer wrote in the Times this last weekend that he “sees the pride people have in their towns and villages through the fostering of community links”. Obviously I’m not suggesting Sir Keir has visited Droxford – yet.

Our next big unique heritage interest is the Swing Riot anniversary but more on that from Adam. It’s hoped that we will be able to reach out to yet more communities and draw them into Droxford.

Finally, whilst our role has developed since original inception now that the building is less at risk, there has been limited tangible activity in the enhancement of the building. However, building expenditure will see embryonic growth and so we’ve doubled expenditure since last year and hope to do so again next year. We’ve also fostered the start of a community of volunteers to help with practical things like gutter clearance and clearing the drain from the Square to alleviate the threat of flooding whilst incurring minimum or no cost.

So in conclusion, I hope that there is now more understanding as to our role moving forward and support from all of you in fulfilling that role.