



St. Sidwell's Community Centre

3-Year Plan
2022



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OVERVIEW



St Sidwell's is a vibrant community centre in the heart of Exeter. We are an independent charity that provides opportunities for people of all abilities and ages, and from any background, to meet and work together. We are based in an area of Exeter with a history of high levels of social deprivation and our key charitable objectives are to strengthen and support the local neighbourhood; to address health inequalities, promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing; and to promote inclusion. St Sidwell's is open to all but we specialise in working with people facing barriers to participation.

Our volunteering programme is at the heart of our work, and volunteers get involved in all areas of the organisation: we run a community cafe, bakehouse and cookery school, provide space and rooms for community groups; run a gardening project, offer free ESOL classes and other educational activities. Across our work we support people to learn and grow through formal and informal education and training opportunities.



VISION

An inclusive Exeter with thriving and interconnected communities.



MISSION

To provide a safe and welcoming community space and opportunities for people from different backgrounds to connect, engage and grow.



VALUES

Our values are focused on inclusion, participation and respect for others.

ABOUT THIS PLAN

This plan was developed by Trustees, Staff and Volunteers at St Sidwell's and in consultation with the wider community. It has been developed as we emerge from Covid restrictions, and there is a strong focus on ensuring our organisational resilience, ability to support the community and rebuilding our activity.

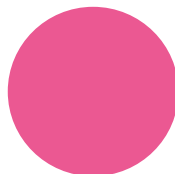
It sets out our key objectives as an organisation, and within each of our project areas over the next three years. It sits alongside an annual implementation plan and budget.

OUR STRATEGY



St Sidwell's Community Centre was established in 2001 as a Healthy Living Centre, and became an independent organisation in 2007. Over that time the organisation has changed and grown, responding to community need and interest and trying new ideas. Our last Strategic Plan focused on testing out and building new enterprise strands, both to provide further opportunities for volunteers and to improve our financial resilience. This led to several new projects and a particular success has been the development of The Sidwell Street Bakehouse.

A review of our existing activity and strategic objectives involving staff, volunteers, trustees and the wider community clearly indicated that people value and support our current core areas of activities: we are committed to strengthening and building this work. However there was also clear feedback that experimenting and trying new things is an important part of St Sid's identity, and so we will retain the flexibility to respond to emerging ideas, needs and interests where these fit with our charitable aims.



IN A NUTSHELL, OUR ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES ARE:

Communities are connected and individuals can participate, engage and grow:

- Volunteers and our wider community engage in fulfilling and meaningful activities and have opportunities to learn and develop
- Individuals & groups are connected through a wide range of volunteering opportunities and community activities
- Diversity is embraced, celebrated and reflected in our programmes and activities
- Everyone is valued and people from all backgrounds feel safe at Sidwell's

We address and respond to local need:

- Continue to offer existing services and activities valued by our community
- Try out new ideas where they meet emerging needs and closely align with our mission and skills
- Play an active role in ensuring local development benefits the local community

Sustainability and resilience:

- Projects and activities are adequately resourced
- Staff and volunteer wellbeing and mental health is supported
- Staff and volunteers have access to training
- We work in partnership with other organisations to achieve our objectives
- Financially resilient
- Strong governance - a diverse and skilled trustee board
- Robust organisational policies and procedures
- Environmental sustainability - recognising the climate and biodiversity crises and working to reduce our environmental impact and have a positive impact on our local area

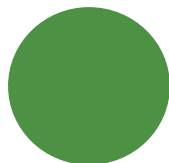
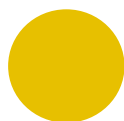
CONTEXT

COVID-19

We have put together this strategic plan as we emerge from Covid-19 restrictions. It has been a time of heightened uncertainty for organisations, communities and individuals, as well as changing the business landscape. St Sidwell's has played a role in supporting people throughout the pandemic.

Our priorities as a result include:

- Recognising the impacts of Covid on individuals around social isolation and mental health and developing new services and partnerships as required to respond to these
- Supporting and encouraging local networking of groups and individuals
- Minimising Covid risk and recognising the possibility of future public health crises
- Rebuilding and regenerating trading income impacted by restrictions



SIDWELL STREET

Sidwell Street is a neighbourhood with a history of higher than average levels of social disadvantage. While there have been recent demographic changes, particularly with an increase in student housing, Sidwell Street continues to have a reputation as a street with particularly high levels of anti-social behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse. Excluding Plymouth, Sidwell Street is almost certainly the most multi-cultural street in Devon. Although there are many empty shops, there are around 90 businesses currently operating in Sidwell Street, most are independent and a good percentage of them are run by people from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are also completed and in-process local developments - the new bus station and St Sidwell's Point leisure centre, as well as the possibility of redevelopment of the corner of Sidwell Street and Paris Street. Right next door, the new YMCA housing development with an entrance on our grounds offers the scope for more partnership working.

As a longstanding community organisation in the area we want to:

- Ensure we play an active role in supporting the development of the area for the benefit of the local community
- Continue to develop the Community Centre site and grounds, as well as our new premises at 178/179 Sidwell Street to improve the area for everyone
- Liaise closely with local partners including the Diocese, who own the grounds of the Community Centre and our neighbours Sovereign Housing and YMCA, as well as local businesses and InExeter who manage the Business Improvement District.

OUR PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES: BACKGROUND AND KEY OBJECTIVES

VOLUNTEERING & WORK EXPERIENCE

Our volunteering programme connects all of our work at St Sidwell's, providing opportunities for local people to participate, engage and grow. Through volunteering at St Sid's, individuals learn new skills and share existing ones; gain work-experience; meet others and make friends; and play an active role in the local community. Volunteers are involved across the full range of our projects and activities. Our volunteers are from diverse backgrounds and have a wide range of life experiences. We are grateful to all the volunteers who offer their time to St Sidwell's.

We are proud that our programme is popular, with over 100 active volunteers, and attracting an average of three new applications each week. Since the end of Covid restrictions, we have experienced a significant increase in demand for our services. Many of our volunteers and centre users more broadly are socially-isolated, and this has intensified during the pandemic. We are finding that the type and level of support people require is much higher than it was prior to the pandemic, and there are more people requiring support.

Key objectives:

- Provide more in-house training and develop partnerships for volunteers to access skills-based training across our programmes
- Offer more sociable and relaxed activities and workshops
- Improve our support offer by providing regular drop-in sessions for volunteers to access one-to-one support
- Encourage and support volunteers to try new activities and volunteering roles both internal and external to the organisation
- Strengthen and expand partnerships and referral routes for volunteers, and seek
- Mental health support and signposting
- Additional training for staff to improve support for volunteers





Our cafe offers good quality, nutritious home-made food at affordable prices. It is the physical centre of the Community Centre and has an important function in welcoming people to the Centre and providing a space for people to spend time, and connect with others. It is a key resource that has helped us to respond to local needs; help build a healthier community; and bring people from diverse backgrounds together. The cafe plays a key role in offering volunteering opportunities in a sociable environment, with opportunities to meet and work with lots of different people. The café has also been a launching pad for new ideas and initiatives.



Key objectives:

- Develop our menu to increase flexibility: making best use of donated produce to create nutritious meals, and provide opportunities each week for volunteers to learn to make different dishes
- Develop the external catering side of the Café, to create more volunteering opportunities and improve financial sustainability
- Explore ways to make fuller use of the Cafe and Kitchen, including Saturday opening, or partnering with other groups
- Work to increase footfall and sales to ensure long-term financial sustainability.





Our Bakehouse was launched as an offshoot of our Cafe in 2018 to increase opportunities for volunteering, and to develop a new income stream for the Centre. The Bakehouse has expanded steadily and in December 2020 we took the opportunity to relocate from a converted office at the community centre to large, empty premises at 178/179 Sidwell Street. We train volunteers to bake sourdough bread, treats, savouries and cakes.

Key objectives:

- Focus on providing a wide range of volunteering opportunities
- Continue to grow our retail and wholesale trade, to increase financial resilience and offer more volunteering opportunities
- Transfer Bakery trading activities into St Sidwell's Trading Company



Cookery classes have always been integral to the work of St Sidwell's. This has often been tied to specific funding programmes, so over time the focus of classes has shifted. At its core, we want to support more people to enjoy cooking delicious meals from scratch. Sometimes we have fully funded free programmes and we also offer public classes at affordable rates.

Key objectives:

- Seek funding for further free cookery courses, in particular informal classes to bring people together and reduce social isolation
- Develop programmes and offer to provide classes in collaboration with other support organisations



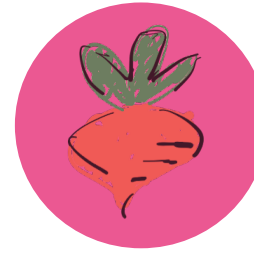


We are lucky to manage one of the few green spaces in the centre of Exeter, the only gardens opening directly onto the High Street or Sidwell Street. Our grounds are enjoyed by members of the public and are a key part of our marketing. The grounds are owned by Exeter Diocese but are entirely maintained by our volunteer gardeners. Gardening provides a range of opportunities for volunteers to learn new skills and share existing ones, meet people, get fresh air and exercise and contribute to the improvement of the local environment.

In addition to looking after our own gardens, we also hold the lease to 16 allotments at St James Station and our Garden Services project sends volunteers out to help local people with their gardens.

Key objectives:

- Secure funding and continue to offer gardening workshops with professional gardeners
- Work with YMCA to plan and rebuild sheds demolished in the course of the YMCA housing development
- Develop plans for a large greenhouse within our grounds to be used for training and workshops as well as increasing the range of plants we can grow to use in our Cafe and Bakehouse as well as for sale.
- Support the development of the St James Garden Allotments
- Continue reaching out and extending our gardening offer to work with local residents and with other organisations.



ESOL (ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES)

St Sidwell's is the largest 3rd sector ESOL provider in Devon (excluding Plymouth) and has been offering free ESOL classes, taught by volunteer teachers, for more than 10 years. Classes are open to all – including migrant workers, refugees, students. In addition we have contracts and grant funding to specifically support ESOL provision for Syrian refugees through the VPRS programme, Afghan refugees through ACRS and ARAP programmes, and Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders.

Key objectives:

- Seek funding for continued provision of free ESOL classes
- Integrate ESOL offer/classes and Volunteering Programme so that all ESOL learners are offered opportunities to volunteer, to support English language learning, participation and integration into the community. This is key to our recognition that career paths in Devon for people from minority ethnic communities are severely limited.
- Continue to work with local and central government to respond to ESOL needs, in particular to support refugees



ROOM HIRE & SPACE FOR THE COMMUNITY

We have six rooms, a café space and a kitchen that are all available for groups to hire – for events, activities or meetings – and this has always been a way we support other community groups and organisations, bring people together and offer educational opportunities. Many of these groups provide opportunities for our volunteers as well as the wider community. St Sidwell's has been a registered Training Provider since 2013 and the community space we provide is often used by education providers such as Learn Devon who offer English and Maths courses for the community.

In addition to our space at the Community Centre, our shopfront location at 178/179 Sidwell Street where our Bakehouse is located, also supports several other community groups and organisations. While we hold this lease, we are committed to sharing this space with other community groups.

Key objectives:

- Continue to offer free or discounted space to some groups as a way of supporting the local community and fulfilling our charitable aims.
- Improve our marketing and outreach to maximise use of our rooms; ensure there is a vibrant programme of events for the whole community; and improve financial resilience.
- Support the positive development of Sidwell Street for the benefit of the whole community, by attracting a wide range of people and groups





LOCAL HERITAGE

Despite the predominance of tired looking 1950's architecture, Sidwell Street has a rich history, dating back more than 2000 years. Our 2016/17 Heritage Lottery Fund project Reviving Lost History and Building Community was very successful and established St Sidwell's as a Heritage Hub for the Eastern Quarter of the city centre. The centre is open for any visitors asking for a tour, to view our Heritage displays and to see the "lost treasures" of St Sidwell's.

With significant change taking place in the area, including the new St Sidwell's Point leisure centre, we want to support a focus on the heritage of the local area, and the communities that make up Sidwell Street.

Key objectives:

- Continue to welcome visitors looking to see our collection of heritage artefacts
- Plan and fundraise for a further Heritage project focusing on the history of the whole of Sidwell Street. The Road to Sidwell Street: A history of the people, the buildings and the businesses of a single street



DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Since the pandemic, we have noticed that the level of support many of our volunteers and regular centre users require is much higher than it was prior to the pandemic, and there are more people requiring support. People are coming to us for mental health support, help understanding Personal Independence Payments or Universal Credit, housing needs, and much more.

Many services have been closed, oversubscribed, or operating at significantly lower capacity - and even where these are now running again, people don't know where to go to access support, and staff don't know where to signpost people, or have adequate training to respond to intensified needs. Over the pandemic period many connections between organisations have also been lost. We have secured development funding to:

Key objectives:

- Research and liaise with other local services
- Create a comprehensive signposting package, to ensure that our volunteers are able to access existing mental health support services
- Develop partnerships and secure funding to encourage access to sustainable mental health support services accessible to our volunteers
- Offer workshops and activities to support volunteers' wellbeing
- Improve staff support and training relating to mental health

St. Sidwell's Community Centre

We like to work with others so if you want to collaborate with us on any of our projects, have other ideas of how we can work together, or would like to support our work in any other way please get in touch.

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Registered charity number: 1122697