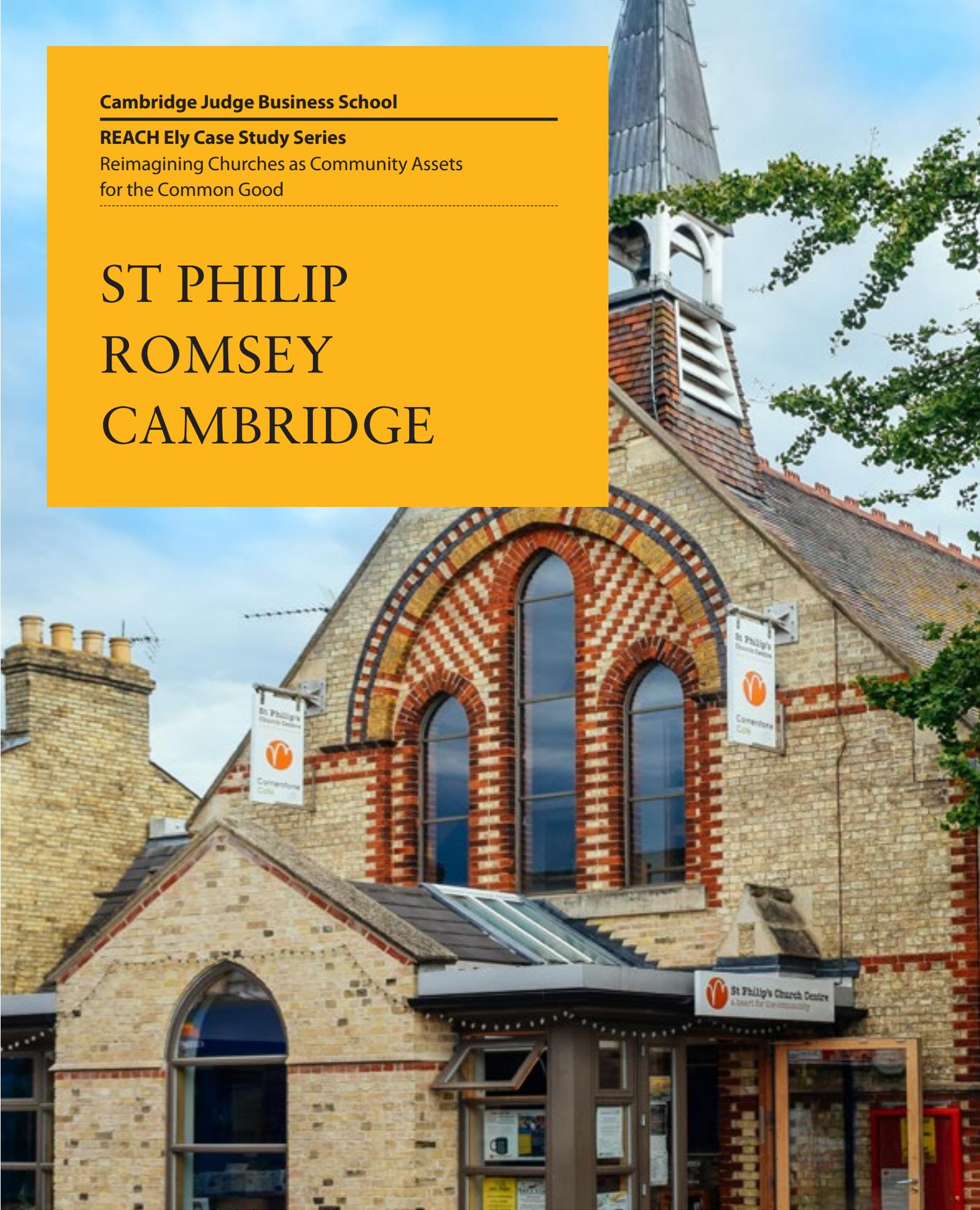


Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# ST PHILIP ROMSEY CAMBRIDGE



*Text, design, photography*

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**REACH Ely (Reimagining Churches as  
Community Assets for the Common Good)**  
is a multi-partner research project that  
aims to help communities make fuller use  
of their churches.

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*The project is implemented by*

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Cambridge Judge Business School  
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*with the generous support of Allchurches Trust  
and Historic England*

**[www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)**

The challenges facing church communities and their buildings have been extensively studied in the light of declining church attendance in the United Kingdom over several decades. REACH Ely aims to address the less-well-understood opportunities for churches to engage and reconnect with the 97.7 per cent of the local communities in the Diocese of Ely who do not attend their parish churches.

With the absence of universal determinants of success and failure of churches in the community engagement context, the REACH Ely project will provide an understanding of the relationship between communities and wider use of church buildings as well as the contribution that churches make to the common good. The project will determine community values, needs and opportunities that can be used in the most effective way to ensure a win-win outcome for communities and sustainable future of church buildings.

The **case study series** is based on in-depth interviews and observations about church building use with informants from a subset of deaneries and parishes in the Diocese of Ely, supplemented with secondary information about the communities they represent. The purpose of the case study is to unearth various church experiences in renovating and envisioning their buildings as missional and social spaces, engaging with local and wider communities, addressing current challenges, and learning from their practice.

The **Glossary** is a separate document that accompanies the case study series. It is available as a download from the project's website [www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)

*On the cover: Church facade on Mill Road, Cambridge.*

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# ST PHILIP ROMSEY CAMBRIDGE

**Church Category:** Urban

**Deanery:** Cambridge South

**Address:** 185 Mill Rd, Cambridge CB1 3AN

**Website:** [www.stphilipschurch.org.uk](http://www.stphilipschurch.org.uk)



## Summary

**Buildings and Artefacts:** Early English style red brick building; Carved pulpit; St Philip's Church Centre; Solar panels on the roof

**Congregation to Population Ratio:** 110 / 8,906

**Fundraising:** Asset sale; Congregational giving; Grant-making trusts

**Income Generation:** Rental income from St Philip's Church Centre

**Communications:** Church centre website; Facebook; Newsletter *Lookout*; Street noticeboards

**Community Engagement:** Cornerstone Café; Cambridge Churches Homelessness Project; Community survey; Visiting programme.

# ROOTS

## Profile

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The St Philip's Church is based in Romsey, a vibrant Cambridge suburb that was built in the 1800s to provide accommodation to railway workers. The close-knit community of railway workers and a relative isolation from the city developed a strong industrial identity and character of the suburb. In the 2011 census, the population of Romsey was 9,252. The area has gentrified in the last twenty years and students and commuters to London contribute to the diversity of the area. In 2018, the local press dubbed Romsey one of the 'hippest' areas because of its village feel and community spirit.

St Philip's is located on Mill Road, a vibrant and cosmopolitan street with good public transport links and easy connections to Cambridge, Stansted and London. In a national competition in 2015, Mill Road was judged one of Britain's Best High Streets. Mill Road hosts an annual Winter Fair with concerts, shops, local history tours and open access to local religious organisations. The Cambridge Central Mosque, a Hindu temple, the evangelical Anglican church of St Barnabas, Seventh Day Adventist Church and St Philip's Church of England Primary School are nearby to St Philip's Church. Other Mill Road amenities include public houses, cafés, multi-ethnic shops, post office, recreation ground, and the Ross Street Community Centre.





Top: Design model of St Philip's after renovation. Middle: Entrance to St Philip's Church Centre from Mill Road. Bottom (Photo by St Philip's Church): Cornerstone Café and Winter Fair in Mill Road.

## Building

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The present red brick St Philip's church building was built between 1890-1900 in the Early English style to replace a wooden chapel nearby. While the church building is not listed, it is a site of architectural importance on Mill Road. By the time of its centenary, St Philip's church services were held on Sundays but the building was tired and underused, for example, unstable floor, poor heating, and primitive kitchen facilities. With no community events, the church was mostly closed on weekdays except for two mornings when a church administrator would be in the office and occasional church evening events took place in a lounge area.

**The Rebuilding Project.** In 2005, a group of active church members and a few young families started a discussion on how to preserve the original church exterior but also revitalise the church at the centre of the community, reinforce the community spirit, and refurbish the building to improve existing facilities and create new spaces for new activities. The rebuilding project team explored how churches in the Cambridge area had managed similar renovation projects. Two levels of redevelopment were identified. The first level, costing £300,000, was to refurbish the church interior, i.e., remove the wooden pews, renew flooring, heating, windows and seating, and install soundproofing, a new kitchen and lounge

areas. The second level, estimated to cost £600,000, involved rebuilding the front of the church building and creating a café. A new upper floor was designed to provide additional rooms, offices and meeting spaces for activities and other community uses. It was decided that both levels were required for full realisation of the vision. The rebuilding project funds were mainly generated from the sale of land owned by St Philip's (*See Fundraising*). During the rebuilding project, Sunday services were held at the nearby St Philip's primary school and some church events were organised in parishioners' homes.

**St Philip's Church Centre.** In 2012 St Philip's was rebranded as the St Philip's Church Centre to reflect its focus on community embeddedness and engagement. Seen from Mill Road, the façade is modern, welcoming and open. The entrance to the Cornerstone Café and two entrances to the church are made of glass to increase visibility into the centre. This intention of the design and layout is to open the building up to the community and create a welcoming ambience. The sign 'St Philip's Church Centre, a Heart for the Community' welcomes visitors to the café and the church. The church is open on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Cornerstone Café is open daily from 8.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. except Tuesdays and Sundays.



Top: Chancel with High Altar and War Memorial. Middle: Entrance to the church through Cornerstone Café; Rearranging chairs for an event.  
Bottom: Glass window of the Creché room; Back of the nave with tables and chairs.

# RUNNING

## Team

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St Philip's Church Centre is managed by the vicar, two associate vicars, part-time curate from September 2019, and an administrator. In addition, St Philip's employs a centre manager, community worker, children and youth coordinator, a café manager, and caretaker.

## Religious Services

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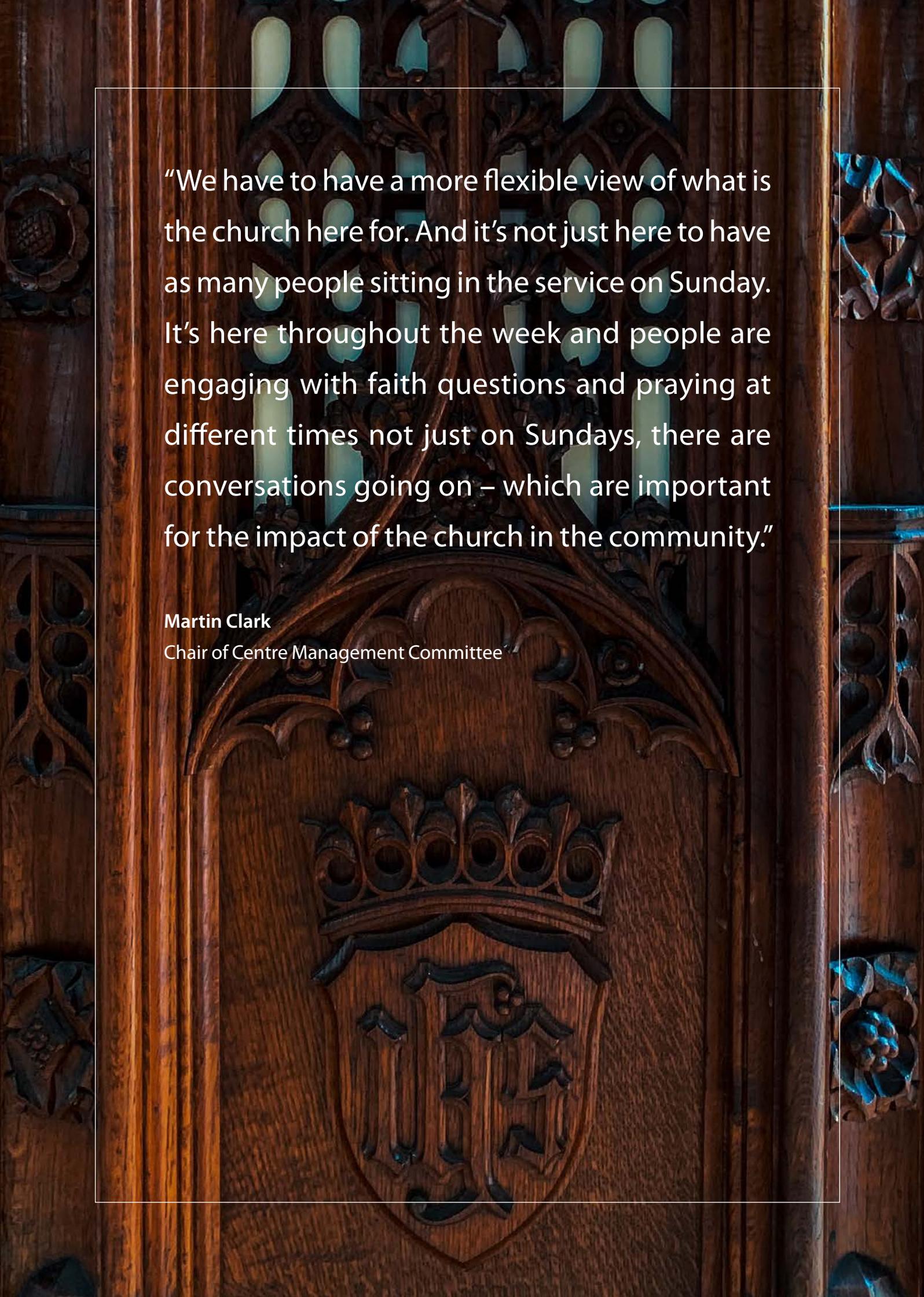
The St Philip's Church holds an all age service weekly at 10.30 a.m., with special groups for children and youth. The Holy Communion service, held on the first Sunday of the month at 8 a.m., is a formal liturgical service with a relaxed ambience.

Other Sunday services include afternoon and evening services: (1) On the afternoon of the first Sunday, there is **Sunday Club** with sandwiches, cakes, drinks, Bible thought, discussion, prayer, and fun activity; (2) An evening service **Soul Food** is on the second Sunday with soup and bread around a table while reading God's word; (3) **Reflective Communion**, a meditative worship, is on the third Sunday; (4) **Songs of Praise** is held on the fourth Sunday, which includes singing with others and chats over coffee; (5) Occasional services are run by **Edge**, the church youth group. There are also **Alpha Course**, faith discussion group meetings, and **Saturday Prayer Breakfast** that has been running for forty years.

## Fundraising

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**Asset sale.** To raise £1.1 million for the rebuilding project, St Philip's was in the fortunate position of owning a piece of land on which a former church, St Stephen's, had stood. To release the value from the land, St Philip's first attempted to develop housing on the site, either for sale or rent. However, subsequent to planning permission issues, the site was sold to the Cambridge Community Church, the C3 Church, an evangelical free church.



“We have to have a more flexible view of what is the church here for. And it’s not just here to have as many people sitting in the service on Sunday. It’s here throughout the week and people are engaging with faith questions and praying at different times not just on Sundays, there are conversations going on – which are important for the impact of the church in the community.”

**Martin Clark**

Chair of Centre Management Committee

## Income Generation

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### General giving

Approximately £60,000 is given annually to the church and the café.

### Rental income

St Philip's generates about £45,000 per annum from the Church Centre room rental: Howard Room (boardroom); Hunt/Stott rooms (separate); Hunt/Stott rooms (combined); Taylor Room (interview room); Auditorium (theatre and lecture hall); and the Lounge (exhibition space).

The Church Centre room rental policy considers the ethics of clients and groups and ensures that the types of planned activities are in line with church values. Further, there are different price levels for charity, business, and private hire. All rooms come with free Wi-Fi, comfortable chairs, access to tea and coffee making room, and flipcharts and whiteboards. On average, more than 30 organisations and professionals, such as psychotherapists and counselling advisors, hire the rooms during the week. Convenient location in Mill Road, closeness to the railway station, and easy access to the Cambridge city centre make St Philip's a suitable rental venue for business and entertainment organisations as well. Despite the busy room rental schedule, some slots are reserved for its own uses.

### Cornerstone Café

Since the opening, the café has yet to generate a surplus (*See Reflections*).

## Communications

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The **St Philip's website** presents the history of St Philip's and provides up-to-date information on church services, events, gallery, and activity groups.

The church publishes a **newsletter** *Lookout* five times a year, which is delivered to more than 4,000 households. The colourful newsletter updates on current and future events, provides reflections on past milestones, interviews of church and café personnel, as well as Romsey community members.

The Church Centre and Cornerstone Café have **Facebook pages**. Announcements are posted on outdoor **noticeboards** and on a sandwich board outside the café.



Top (Photo by St Philip's Church): Baptism service and community choir event. Middle rows: Wheelchair-accessible elevator, meeting rooms, and creché room. Bottom: Upper floor meeting rooms.

# REACH

## Community

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### Cornerstone Café

From Mill Road, Cornerstone Café looks like an independent catering business. The Church Centre sign and steeple are the only indications that the café is a part of a church: *'People could come to the café and not really know it was a church'*, says Martin Clark.

While the original intentions of opening a café at the front of the church were to create a friendly social space and attract visitors to Sunday services, since its launch in 2012, the Cornerstone Café has been at the forefront of the St Philip's social mission, especially tackling loneliness and isolation.

"A lot of people in the café are coming because they can have company and they can sit there a long time. Some of them aren't even welcome in the commercial cafés because they sit there too long and don't eat or drink enough. Here, they might have coffee lasting two hours or more. So, we're here for them really."

**Martin Clark**

Chair of Centre Management Committee

<sup>1</sup>"Impacting the Community",  
*Lookout*, St Philip's Church  
Centre newsletter,  
Christmas 2018, page 2.

A range of community activities, from crafts to social group and activities promoting friendship, takes place in the café. *'A key thing we do is provide work experience for those who would otherwise struggle to find a suitable place. This is usually due to their limited social or learning skills'*, says Lindsey Stanton, community worker.<sup>1</sup>

In the summer 2018, a team of volunteers and staff redecorated the café. The redecoration project received positive feedback from customers whose views were published in the autumn issue of the church newsletter. The food is cooked on the premises by a local resident chef who uses fresh produce. On average, the café serves 300 customers per weekday, with more customers on weekends. Since June 2019, the café has moved to a lower cost operation with one paid member of staff supported by volunteers. For family events such as weddings and funerals, the café can arrange a flexible catering service.



Top (Photo by St Philip's Church): Cornerstone Café interior. Bottom: Church Centre entrance and information materials in the café.



Top three rows: Phil's People event and Craft Café activities. Bottom: Tot's Time event for families and children (Photo by St Philip's Church).

## Events

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**Focus on children and young families.** There are several weekly events tailored for young families and children such as **Tot's Time**, Sunday morning **children's group**, and **MOPS (Mothers of Pre-schoolers)** social group for young mothers to meet and provide mutual support in motherhood. Childcare during MOPS sessions is provided by the church children's coordinator.

In its rental policy, St Philip's steers some of the rental activity towards activities benefiting the local community. This frees the time for the church to organise family and community events. For example, one of the popular family and pre-school activities in the church is a **music event** by 'Mr Baboon', an entertainer who hires space at St Philip's Church Centre.

**Friday Friends**, an events group for elderly people that arrange table activities, quizzes and sharing memories, photos, poems etc. Meetings conclude with a short time of prayer. Another regular event is the **Lunch Club** for elderly people.

**Activities for people in need.** St Philip's organises a monthly meal evening event, **Phil's People**, for people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities and resident in sheltered or supported housing. Phil's People activities also include Sunday Club, Bring and Share Group, and occasional outings. A former churchwarden and active member of the Romsey community cooks meals for the event. The Church Centre has set up weekly **Craft Café** (Tuesday mornings) and **Tuesday Together** (afternoons) for retired people and those with life difficulties to socialise over coffee and craft making.

**Activities for wider community.** The Church Centre is open to the idea to welcome interesting groups to use its space free of charge to help and give them a chance to start. On a weekly basis, there are regular hobby, arts, and health groups such as yoga (with 20 people attending), exercising, belly dancing, and theatre (40 subscribers). On national events, St Philip's is open for general public and its congregation to watch live shows, such as England's 2018 World Cup matches.

## Engagement

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### Collaboration with other churches and organisations

St Philip's jointly with St Martin's (See *REACH Ely case study: St Martin Cambridge*), Mill Road Baptist Church, and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church organise annual Family Fun Day in Romsey Recreation Ground. Additionally, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church uses St Philip's for its annual free Health Expo and Health Checks.

### Youth work

The collaboration with other churches and the Romsey Mill Community Centre has created a community anchor organisation that has been providing work with different youth groups and their parents for the last 30 years.

### Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP) ([www.cchp.org.uk](http://www.cchp.org.uk))

St Philip's Church Centre is a participating member church in the Cambridge Churches Homelessness Project to offer a hot meal and overnight accommodation to homeless people between December and March (See also *REACH Ely case study: St Mark, Newnham, Cambridge*). Though helping the project depends on many volunteers, some are paid to enable it to happen. To support homeless people, the church has befriended some of the regular visitors.

“It’s not just a community centre though, it’s definitely a community hub attached to a church and there is interaction and overlap. A ‘local hub church’ probably describes it in some way.”

**Martin Clark**

Chair of Centre Management Committee

# REFLECTIONS

## Challenges

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### Community consultation

In 2007, St Philip's Church distributed more than 4,000 questionnaires to local homes in order to gather their views on the church rebuilding project. This method was not successful in collecting feedback in the urban community.

### Lack of volunteers

The major concern for St Philip's was the ability to use the new building to its full capacity, which raises the need for and efforts in bringing in volunteers looking after the building and the café.

### Community attachment to church building and fixtures

Some initial community resistance to holding church services in a primary school during the church rebuilding project had to be managed. Further, and as found in other churches (for example, see *REACH Ely case studies of Linton, Bartlow, and March*), removal of wooden pews divides opinion. After lengthy congregation and community consultation, the pews were removed to increase flexibility of building use.

### Sustainability of community café model

When opened in 2012, the Cornerstone Café was managed in partnership with a local trust with experience of running community cafés to provide work experience for disabled clients (*See also REACH Ely case study: Sawston Free Church*). In 2017, however, the partnership was dissolved and the café has since been subsidised and managed by St Philip's but has yet to generate a surplus. The important social role and intangible community benefits attributed to the café are, however, fundamental to delivering church mission. The business model of the café is being refined and looks more sustainable with a single paid staff member to manage alongside volunteers.

“We wondered whether we could change the model of the café, so it loses less money, it’s not come here, pay money, and consume food but bring people in and maybe engage them more? It might be turning the café model on its head and saying do you want to come and do the cooking, or learn about healthy eating, or just bring your own sandwiches and watch a film in the hall... Those sorts of things might break down the barriers between being passive consumers of church or activities in church versus becoming slightly more engaged members. We can put all sorts of interesting activities on, but does that bring in the engagement?”

**Martin Clark**

Chair of Centre Management Committee



### Lessons Learned

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#### **To support people in need through creating volunteering opportunities**

The café supports a team of 8-10 volunteers who work at the café to gain work experience, learn new skills and improve self-esteem. For several volunteers, the café work experience has helped to secure employment.

#### **To invest in buildings maintenance**

Approximately £10,000 of church income is invested in a church reserve fund to maintain the upkeep of the buildings and facilities. Wear and tear on the Church Centre rooms will rise as usage increases. Buildings maintenance is ongoing to keep the facilities in good order and continue to generate income.

*“If you have the means of fundraising to change your building quite dramatically, significantly so it’s a totally new, fresh operation but still a church obviously, go for the most ambitious thing you can, as long as you’re confident enough that you can then keep it going.”*

**Martin Clark**

Chair of Centre Management Committee

#### **To use the church building for activities that benefit the local community and the church**

St Philip’s Church Centre rooms and café collectively foster positive social impact, for example, art and craft groups bring people together and improve their self-esteem. Economic benefits also flow from the activities, for example, employment opportunities and income from the sale of arts and crafts. As these benefits are directly connected to the St Philip’s church, they strengthen the community embeddedness of St Philip’s.

#### **To accept that entrepreneurial use of church buildings involves risk**

For the St Philip’s Church, its location in a vibrant suburb, wide customer base, committed congregation and enthusiastic volunteers have helped to manage the risks associated with developing multiple income streams.

#### **To accept that effective community service requires commitment**

To maximise Church Centre use requires staff to manage the buildings, maintenance, logistics, finances, deliver services and support the community. These roles require people willing to take them on, or may need to be paid for.



“There are all these things that bring people into the church building, but do these bring them into the church fellowship as a community, the membership? That is much more difficult...

To be more sustainable, we need more people to join the church as members who actually then support it and get stuck in. Not just because they're turning up on Sunday but because they then want to help people themselves and be helped by helping others.”

**Martin Clark**

Chair of Centre Management Committee

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