

June 2017 – February 2024

Chapel Stores – Keeping the Light Burning

In 2017 it became evident that East Boldre's last remaining shop and Post Office (located at Barton Villa on Main Road and run by Ian Evan's since 2001) would close upon his impending retirement. In order to safeguard these vital local amenities, a project was initiated to provide premises from which to run a community owned and run shop and Post Office.

Initially the project focussed on extending the village hall to provide space for a shop. Mike Husband, Steve Antczak (both Village Hall trustees), Andy Brennan, Kate Holden and Guy McNair Wilson (building designer) were the early proponents and they were joined by Rebecca Gabzdyl (shop project manager and business planning) in January 2019.

A detailed business plan for the shop was created with support from the Plunkett Foundation. It drew upon the wealth of experience and knowledge shared by other community shops through Plunkett's Facebook page and the the Woodgreen community shop team. (This initial plan formed the basis for the business plan for Chapel Stores and was instrumental in our subsequent fundraising success).

Following discussions with the National Park Authority and several design iterations a planning application was submitted in May 2020 with permission finally achieved 13 months later in June 2021 (20/00315).

However, in late 2018 it had become apparent that operating a shop at the Village Hall was problematic as it is sited on commoned Crown Land (which is restricted to purely recreational uses). By September 2020, it had proved impossible to secure the Verderers consent needed to operate a shop there.

The project's focus consequently shifted to trying to lease or buy the existing shop property. Now separate to the Village Hall development, the project was led by Rebecca and East Boldre Community Stores Limited (EBCS) was constituted as a community benefit society in October 2020 by Rebecca Gabzdyl, Mike Hawker, Andy Brennan and Libby Duignan. The management committee was later bolstered by Judith Richardson, Nick Thompson and Anna Rostand. However, despite promising initial discussions Ian Evans eventually decided to retain the property as his home.

By February 2022 the project had ran out of options for shop premises having considered various local alternatives (including St Mary's, the former British Legion building and the School Fields site).

EBCS was then dormant for five months until the former Baptist Chapel came onto the market in July 2022. It was clear from the first viewing on 26th August 2022 that it was by far the best of all the options for shop premises previously considered.



The chapel, on its 0.23 acre site, offered the largest retail area, the Vestry would provide a flexible community space and, with the demolition of the ancillary hall, space for off road parking. It presented an exciting opportunity and David and Alison Moore-Gwyn were co-opted to strengthen EBCS's management committee for the challenges ahead.

In short order the shop business plan was updated, a new project plan drafted to address the repairs and alterations needed to bring the rather dilapidated chapel back into use and to adapt and fit it out for its new purpose.

East Boldre Parish Council kicked off EBCS's fundraising in September 2022 with a grant of £2,500 along with a grant of £500 from Keith Manns, East Boldre's Hampshire County Councillor. A £6000 Booster Development grant was also secured. Together these funds covered the project's development costs – planning, building valuation and surveys, newsletters, website hosting costs and share offer prospectus and standard marking.

To keep the community informed of the project's progress EBCS's ShopTalk newsletter was delivered to 700 local addresses by a fabulous team of 38 'Lane Reps' at key stages in the project and a website was developed by the team.

The planning application (22/00825FULL) to change the use of the chapel to a shop was submitted in November 2022. Permission was granted on 8th February 2023 subject to a condition that all groundworks would need to be supervised by a professional archaeologist given the ~500 graves remaining on the chapel site.

EBCS's community share offer, launched on 20th January 2023, was the means by which local people could become members of the society and the owners of the shop with a say in its running. Amazingly, thanks to the generosity of local residents, £221,700 was raised in just 6 weeks from 287 individuals and companies outstripping the £200,000 target along with over £28,000 in additional donations. This truly demonstrated local desire to preserve a shop in the village and was a key factor in the project's subsequent fundraising success.

The equity raised provided the bulk of the match funding needed to secure a significant award of £299,500 from the government's Community Ownership Fund (part of their 'levelling up' agenda) which was announced in the April 2023 budget.

With these funds in place EBCS completed on the purchase of the Chapel for £280,000 on 12th May 2024.



Two days later, as part King Charles III coronation celebrations, EBCS organised a 'Big Help Out' (one of many held across the country) to prepare for building works to commence. Forty seven local volunteers worked hard all day to remove the chapel's kitchen units and flooring, toilets and vestry panelling and partitioning. Carpets were removed and the chapel's pine panelling was removed, sanded and treated ready for replacement. The graveyard was cleared of weeds, the dilapidated shed was dismantled and a box was built around Benjamin Biddlecombe's tomb to protect it during the demolition of the hall. The existing path was taken up (all of the blocks were reused in the new paths) while a team scraped off the chapel's peeling exterior paint.

This exhausting but happy day was rounded off with a barbeque to celebrate a job well done. It truly demonstrated the community engagement in the project and saved EBCS £9,500 in costs.

(Subsequent 'Big Help Outs' relied on the community for help with decorating, gardening, building shelving and preparing for the shop opening).



Grants were also received from New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council and the New Forest National Park Authority towards the costs of building works which commenced on 16th May 2024. Tuakana were selected as the main contractor with Keffen Construction carrying out the hall demolition and groundworks. Sustainability was at the heart of the works which included:

- The demolition of the hall (built in 1993) was necessary to make way for off road parking in order to avoid the shop causing congestion on Chapel Lane. A permeable block surface over a thick layer of aggregate forms the car park's sustainable drainage system as the presence of graves onsite prevented excavations for conventional drainage soakaways. An ecologist supervised the hall's demolition to ensure no bats were affected while Wessex archaeology supervised the removal of the hall's concrete slab and car park excavations to ensure any graves disturbed were recorded. Thankfully neither bats nor bodies were disturbed and once again the chapel was fully visible from Chapel Lane.



- Addressing severe damp issues including replastering the walls to 1.2m high with a specialist plaster; injecting a damp proof course; completely removing the aged and flaking exterior paint; resealing around the windows; repainting the building's exterior and installing new guttering.
- Both roofs needed reinforcement with substantial timbers to make them structurally sound and thick layers of insulation were added. An internal crash deck ensured workers' safety in the main roof space as the joists are not strong enough to support their weight. (Future access to the main roof space is not advised without a similar crash deck in place).



- Double glazed French windows transformed the vestry into a light pleasant space for varied community use and the two original brick fireplaces uncovered when the plastic panelling was removed now add character to the space.
- Installation of a 11.2kW solar system with battery storage to halve the shop's electricity costs and to ensure the shop remains operational during the not infrequent power cuts East Boldre experiences.
- Air source heat pumps provide heating and cooling along with LED lighting throughout to minimise energy consumption. The whole building was rewired and fire and intruder alarms were installed along with CCTV to improve the security of Chapel Stores.
- A new kitchen was installed to support both the shop (baking bread; making sandwiches; buying in bulk and repackaging) and social activities in the Vestry Space.
- The two existing toilets were adapted to create a single accessible toilet.
- A small storeroom was created in what was part of the lobby and a new plantroom on the mezzanine.
- Significant modifications were needed to meet current fire regulations. Internal and external emergency lighting was installed. The staircase was enclosed and the wall between the retail area and vestry was lined with fireboard. The chapel's original solid mahogany internal double doors were retained but had to be painted with intumescent paint.



Materials were reused wherever possible.

- The chapel's beautiful parquet floors were restored.



- The baptistery was filled in with sand and bricks found onsite and capped with concrete. Matching teak parquet flooring, reclaimed from the lobby, was laid over it with a change in orientation of the blocks used to outline the baptistery's position.
- The staircase spindles now form the mezzanine balustrade and the pine panelling was replaced once works to address damp had been completed.
- The two intricate cast iron ceiling roses were restored by Nick Thompson and are now set either side of the internal double doors. The 8 roses now on the ceiling are plaster casts of these originals.



- The chapel's 1893 trestle tables, which had been in use by the church until 1983, were found in the loft and were used to make furniture for the new shop and the toilet window sill.
- When the chapel's wooden sign (below left) was taken down for restoration the original stone sign (below right) was discovered. It shows that the chapel was originally known as Beaulieu Chapel. Both signs were restored with the wooden sign now displayed in the lobby so that the original stone sign might remain visible above the chapel entrance.



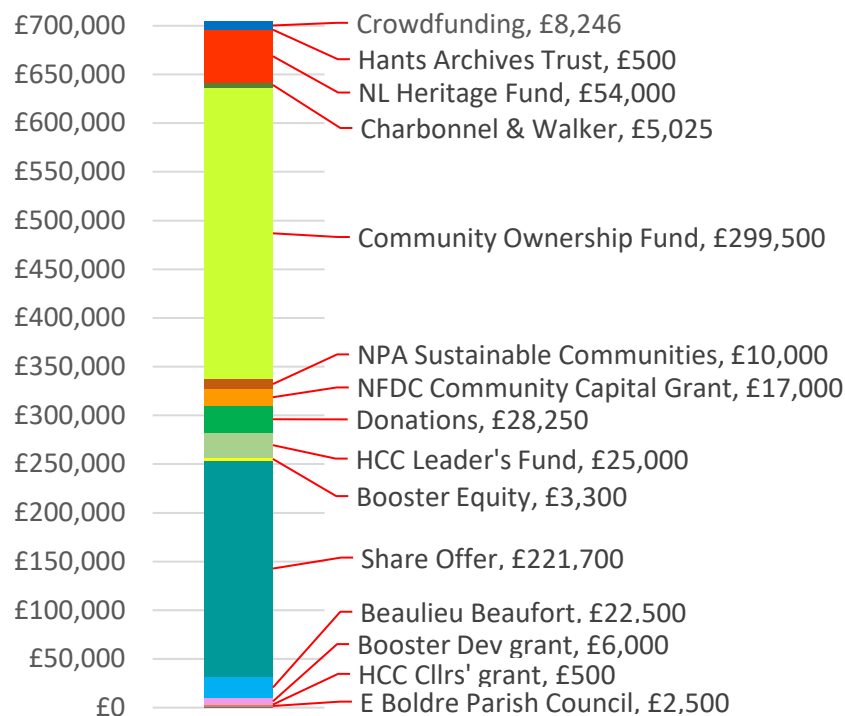
- The chapel's original tea set, with a 'Baptist Church Beaulieu' motif was also discovered in the loft along with several bibles. The bibles have been lodged with St Barbe museum for safe storage in their archives.



Preserving and celebrating the heritage of the locally listed chapel, East Boldre's first church, was important from the outset of the project. EBCS was awarded £54,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund in part towards the costs of the planned building works but, more importantly, enabled EBCS to develop an exhibition of the chapel's history, digitise key chapel records, produce both onsite and online interpretation of the graveyard and built heritage and to publish this book. A key part of this community heritage activity was to involve a broad range of local people in capturing the inscriptions on the 52 headstones that remain onsite using a variety of modern imaging techniques with the help of professional archaeologists.

EBCS partnered with St Barbe Museum in this heritage project, who brought a wealth of experience and contacts and Chapel Stores is delighted to provide a venue for St Barbe's touring exhibitions.

Overall, £704,443 was raised in just 12 months and all of the project's benefactors are shown below. EBCS are very grateful for this generous support that enabled East Boldre's residents to come together to retain vital village amenities that are essential to our rural community



Product and supplier selection started in September 2023 and this activity was bolstered when Malvena Stuart Taylor and Simon Ricketts were elected to the management committee at EBCS's first Annual Members' Meeting in November 2023.

Key to the financial viability of Chapel Stores was retention of the salaried 'community status' Post Office contract held by Ian Evans. After protracted negotiations thanks to the intervention of East Boldre's MP, Sir Julian Lewis, this was secured in January 2024.

A team of paid staff were recruited. Ian Evans and Valerie Lomax joined the team, bringing their considerable experience from the previous shop. They were joined by the very capable Sarah Lomax. They were supported by an enthusiastic team of 42 volunteers who clean, bake bread, stack shelves, make sandwiches and maintain the grounds.

Together, Nick Thompson and Rebecca Gabzdyl, had specified and managed the building works. Unfortunately, Nick's health declined steadily from the autumn of 2023 and the whole team were shocked and saddened by his untimely death on 3rd February 2024. His last wish was that he could have seen the shop completed. A dignified and courageous man, his wise counsel and sense of humour are much missed.

Chapel Stores and Post Office was opened for business on 26th February 2024 by John Illsley (Dire Straits bass guitarist) and a roaring day's trade was done as local people flocked to support East Boldre's newest amenity.



Acknowledgments

The EBCS management committee (past and present) owe a debt of gratitude to the following for their support and expertise throughout the Chapel Stores project.

A special mention must go to **Rebecca Gabzdyl**, a founding member of East Boldre Community Stores Limited. She was the driving force behind the project and worked tirelessly to specify, plan and manage the project, raise the necessary funds and worked hard to overcome the many challenges faced in order to safeguard our village shop and Post Office since January 2019. EBCS recognizes what a huge contribution Rebecca has made to the community; because of it we can all be proud of Chapel Stores and the heritage that has been protected.

Michael Donaldson FRICS, Marquis and Co – for his kind support and expertise throughout the project and for acting as our building contract administrator pro-bono in the development of Chapel Stores.

Philip Salt, Scott Bailey – from 2019 he provided legal expertise, on a largely pro-bono basis, through the various iterations of our community shop project.

Iain Rawlinson – for his counsel throughout the project, help in drafting the share prospectus and for providing storage at Lodge Farm during the build.

Lynn Clark – for her pro-bono help with graphic design of the chapel's signage and heritage exhibition and colour choices for the chapel's exterior.

Richard and Lynn Paul – for their work to select the shop's EPOS system.

Gerard Downes, Ginna Gaynor, Sophia Moore, Share Offer Dream team – for so effectively championing our share offer.

Keith Mans, HCC Councillor - championed our COF grant application organising the expert help of **Michelle Morley** in drafting our initial application. Also, for his support of our fundraising and for assisting with road signage.

Sir Dr Julian Lewis MP – for his active support of our COF application and productive intervention in the Post Office contract negotiations.

Michael Harris and Dan Poole, NFDC councillors - for support with fundraising and our planning and grant applications.

Steve Avery and Carly Cochrane, National Park Planning Authority - for their advice with the shop planning applications since 2019, 3rd time lucky!

Jerry Ponsford, Baptist regional minister – for enabling access to the chapel to plan and cost the project before EBCS completed on the chapel purchase.

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Lane Reps – these individuals showed early faith in our project, provided insightful feedback on our initial plans and braved all weathers to deliver the ShopTalk newsletter across our community postcodes.

Alan Gardiner	John Graves	Mary Montagu Scott	Richard Paul
Andy Brennan	Judith Richardson	Michael Donaldson	Richard Vaughan
Anna Rostand	Judy Donaldson	Mike Gibson	Rob Kitcher
Becki Broomfield	Karen MacLeod	Mike Hawker	Sigrid Gibson
Brett Johnson	Ken MacLeod	Mike Husband	Sophia Moore
Denise Cheetham	Kevin House	Nick Thompson	Steph Fairweather
Frances Gardiner	Laura Kitcher	Paul Ivers	Stephen Boyd
Gary Edwards	Lesley Boyd	Rachel Kitcher	Steve Antczak
Ginna Gaynor	Lynn Clark	Rachel Parsons	Sue Crahall
Jack Gabzdyl	Lynn Paul	Rebecca Gabzdyl	