

Update on **The Portway Annexe** for the Parish Council meeting on March 6th 2024

The Wells City Council owned Portway Annexe continues to be a thriving centre for multiple social, cultural and educational activities growing in its outreach since opening in May 2022.

Activities held there include:

Strode College's re-employment courses, Portway Music School, Wells u3a, tots play, children's ballet, adult tap, photography, art, sewing, counselling, meditation, birthday parties and concerts, a Friday morning café open to all and a Citizens Advice access point.

The Audio Visual Room is now fully equipped and soundproofed and can be hired for band rehearsals and recording.

Portway Performing Arts engages with the community each Saturday teaching all forms of theatrics, acting, singing, costume design and prop making.

The Annexe has also worked well as a Polling Station (Neighbourhood Plan) and hosted the Wells Environment Day last summer.

The stained-glass expert Edgar Philips is currently resident there; he offers Art Experience Days for those with mental health issues, disability and health conditions.

The Annexe has excelled at providing a Welcome Hub for the Ukrainian families living in the area where they can socialise, undertake language classes and gain all manner of support from the Charis funded part time Hub Manager assisted by WCN Ukraine. The building is also now acting as a Central Hub for satellite refugee centres with Charis substantially increasing their funding.

Space at the Annexe was offered to the Blue School whilst their accommodation is compromised by concrete failings.

Two successful "Monkey Markets" have taken place where families can buy and sell items relating to small children and babies.

The Annexe is manned 6 days a week including evenings and is very ably led by manager Alex Westwood who, along with his team and WCC Officers has great vision for the facility. It can also be available on a Sunday for a higher fee.

A Portway Annexe Management Group has been convened and meets every 3 months. This comprises 2 WCC Officers, 4 WCC Councillors and two residents from the vicinity.

Income from lettings has hit the £4,000 monthly target. Some months (where there are no school holidays or half terms) yield considerably more. January 2024's takings exceeded £5,000 and March this year is predicted to bring in £5,337.

Our aim is that it is self sustaining by June this year.

Hire charges are intentionally kept reasonable so that it fulfils its intention of being an affordable community facility. VAT at 20% had to be added to all hire fees last April. Happily no groups have had to leave as a result.

24 parking spaces also yield a considerable annual income (predicted £24,000). 3 remain vacant and the newly opened Sheep and Penguin Pub nearby may hire these for their summer guests. Mendip Community Transport were asked to leave due to erratic driving.

Refurbishment of the building continues with the aim of making it more environmentally efficient. The boiler has undergone major repairs with research into a grant for a new eco boiler in future. All lights will be LED in the next 2 years. The main heating feed pipework has been insulated and

window glass replaced where cracked. Rotten roof verges have been removed and WCC Outside Spaces team work hard on keeping the grounds tidy. A local resident, Keith, tends the area alongside the building erecting structures and planting vegetables for community gathering!

We wish to see the Portway Annexe continue to be used as a vibrant community building for people of all ages to meet, learn, create and have fun.

Please do contact Alex on 01749 673091 or comms@wells.gov.uk if you wish to make bookings.

Cllr Deborah Orrett.

Chair, Portway Annexe Management Group. 27/02/2024