

## Bats in Churches Project Demonstration Day (4 October 2017) Engagement session notes

Inspiring people to get involved in their local heritage is a big part of the Bats in Churches Project. BiC participants have been sharing the many ways communities already use their churches, along with the challenges they face as custodians of local heritage. We will use this research to further develop our five year programme.

### What is the church role in heritage

#### Natural Heritage

- Bats
- Birds – Swifts/ Kestrels
- Lichens
- Very old yews
- Nature reserves/ County wildlife sites
- Grassland – difference between mown, grazed, wild
- Churchyard is a haven for wildlife
- Churchyard is a local nature reserve – work with the wildlife trust
- Churchyard conservation scheme; Caring for Gods Acre
- Wildflower meadows creation and management – not cutting a third each year

#### Built Heritage & Artefacts

- Monuments and Memorials
- Organs, bells, clocks
- Original features
- Paintings and Tapestries
- Mural hidden behind plaster
- Personal links – memorial pews
- Graffiti
- Textiles
- Glass
- Space to host art exhibitions
- Archaeology
- HLF funding
  - Restoration of bells & organ
  - Funding for history exhibition
  - Pilgrims trail
- War graves

## The heritage role of the church in the community/society

- Refuge
- Constant in community
- Reduce social isolation – coffee shop
- Transferable skills; crafts, music etc
- Rural – part of the community
- Role in time
- Link to local history
- Social history
- Creates links to other organisations; Parish Council, Local History Society, Wildlife Trust, horticultural society
- Memorial
- CCT churches
  - Use of appropriate cleaning products
  - Training volunteers
- Records – land/ finance/ social
- Provide community facilities; especially important where there are none.
- Educational use – used by local primary school (inside and out)
- Footpaths through churchyard

## The heritage and role of the church within the wider locality

- Greenspace in urban setting
- Lunchtime
- Relation with other landowners
- Link to large events
- Landuses
- Sites of regional/ national and international interest
- Links to national history e.g. our font has links to the navy, civil war and the reformation
- Abraham Lincoln trail – attracts bus loads in summer
- Celebrate local art and culture
- Family history research
- Websites and publications

## Examples of engagement in heritage by Churches

### Natural heritage

- Bat Champing
- Bat walks
- God Arce
- Guide walks/ talks
- Bats & churches nights – talks, see bats, kids activities (890 people £1000's raised)
- Bio-blitz



- Tatty Bat – Education, booklet, Bat Night
- Interest in wildlife attracts more and different volunteers; work parties to maintain churchyard
- Bat, Bird and swift boxes (Parish Council Funding)
- CCTV to watch birds of prey
- Bluebell weekends and snowdrop open days – tea, cake and fundraising.
- Church (social history) and Bat BBQ – people came from 40 miles away
- Promote the Bats on the church website

### **Built Heritage & Artefacts**

- Schools, links to the curriculum
- Maintenance Co-ops, training
- Social dimension to engagement
- Schools day – see the build
- Working parties and volunteers
- Contractors with apprentices
- Roof repairs – demo at ground level (note H&S and insurance requirements)
- Church Tours
- Have church open
- PCC AGM – open
- ‘Open the Book’ – involving schools
- Angels & Pinnacles
  - Tourism trails
  - Community art in church
  - Church guide
  - Photo course
- Work closely with the local history society
- Heritage open days
- Churchyard attracts people

### **Community/ Social Engagement**

- Street Pastors – deal with evening drunks
- Village Fete; May Fair – craft stalls in church
- Residents survey, door to door is important
- Parish Magazines
- Arts
- Sponsored bike ride round churches
- Well used footpaths through churchyard – on going engagement.
- Christmas celebrations around village
- Want to engage with the wider community; participating in the development of a local plan by the Parish Council

## What experience have you had so far in engaging people in heritage?

### What has worked?

#### Types of activity

- Guided tours of churchyard
- Use by school – creating a ‘messy church’
- Walks from the church around the local area – often taking in a meal at a pub or village hall.
- Links to national commemorations – such as WW1, Quenns 90<sup>th</sup> birthday etc
- Demonstration of high level masonry repair transferred to ground level
- Use of church for re-enactments – Elizabethan school
- Schools recording grave stone inscriptions
- Church used at night for first aid and mental health services
- Beer Festival in the church – brought in new volunteers
- WW1 – local people asked to contribute family stories and artefacts such as gas masks
- Social engagement activities – hospitality for walkers, host famers market, book swap
- Bat night – very good to change attitudes
- Bat Champing – sleeping with Bats
- Bat education day with ecologist/ builder/ architects for local schools
- Pilgrimage
- Conversion of church to community use
- Bat Group clean up
- Heritage walks – linking the history of the church and the community together
- Friends groups
- Ride and Stride events linking churches
- Heritage trails – link to School curriculum
- Visiting bell ringers
- *“Less Holy Bread, more Garlic Bread – if it free”*
- Archaeology open days
- Birds – dawn chorus walks and breakfast
- Easter Egg hunt
- Local young people wildlife groups – Forest Schools/ Wildlife watch
- Talks and walks on aspects of the churches heritage – Brasses/ stained glass
- Cleaning days – twice a year with the help of the local Bat Group.
- Sharing histories – church/ community/ military connections/ family history

#### What has been learnt?

- Important to communicate with the wider community about change
  - Church wardens reporting regularly to the parish council on restoration work
  - Participate in Parish Plans/ appraisals
  - Village survey to understand relationship between church and community

- Opportunity to encourage volunteer working parties during conservation works – capitalise on the interest.
- Use CCTV cameras to show people progress of restoration works in accessible parts of the church
- Keep the church continually open – more visitors than you might expect. The key is not to be deterred by what might go wrong
- Encourage a tour from another church and share ideas – was very instructive for us as well as them
- Bat posters – informing people about the church and its bats rather than apologising for them
- Photo's/ Video recording of bats – people like to see them in the church
- You can make money out of bats!
- Work with the willing
- Increase footfall increases interest in the church – weddings, summer clubs for kids, Cake sales etc
- Approaching Ramblers, U3A, Rotary and providing access to the church for guided tours means that you only organise the tour not the group.

## What has not worked quite so well?

### Types of activity

- Opening for national heritage days – not publicised enough. Lots of effort for little return
- Running a Bat event without knowing what species were present – people wanted to know!
- Community café failed – due to poor management

### What has been learnt?

- Volunteer groups are not always reliable
- Church guide books are often too wordy
- Many people are too busy to organise things
- Traditional church events such as jumble sales can appear very old fashioned – will not attract new people
- Challenge of keeping a project going after the initial enthusiasm
- Charging for events
- Open all hours often causes problems - theft
- Church conditions play a big part in success or otherwise
  - No Loo's
  - Cold environment puts people off
  - Pews not comfy