

HRH THE EARL OF WESSEX OPENS AWARD-WINNING WESSEX LEARNING CENTRE AT WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Friday 29 April, 2016



Winchester Cathedral received a very welcome visit from HRH The Earl of Wessex when he opened the newly built Learning Centre in the Inner Close, which will henceforth be called the Wessex Learning Centre.

Around 100 people attended this exciting event which marks a significant milestone in the development of new facilities at the Cathedral. Before he formally opened the centre His Royal Highness, who is Patron of the Winchester Cathedral Appeal, spent time meeting many those present. They included dignitaries led by Mr Nigel Atkinson, Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire, and various others involved with the building of the new centre, educational volunteers and those who fundraised towards the project. He also spent time with a group of 30 Year 6 children from St Faith's Church of England Primary School as they enjoyed a workshop about making stained-glass windows. At the end of the formal opening both The Dean and then The Bishop blessed the Centre.

To top off the excitement of the occasion, it was announced only the evening before that the design of the Centre, by Hampshire County Council Property Services Department, had won a coveted award from the Royal British Institute of Architects in the South.



The Wessex Learning Centre is one of two buildings which form the Cathedral's New Learning Centre, welcoming approximately 25,000 young people every year from around the world as they discover the 1000-year heritage of Winchester Cathedral and its life today. It will also provide invaluable auditorium space for workshops, lectures and similar events at other times.

It is a complete 'new-build' on a formerly unused piece of land behind the former Education Centre and is a multi-functional learning centre which can accommodate up to 120 students within the Cathedral Close.



The building itself uses sustainable materials, such as handmade clay tiles for its large sweeping roof, whilst the oak framed structure beneath uses wood from wind-blown trees near Basingstoke. The building is surrounded by a contemporary version of an Apothecary's Garden with plant and herb species that would have been grown there for medicines and balms in monastic times. The design work needed to be sensitive to the historic surrounding, as the whole site is designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and surrounding buildings are Grade I listed.

In September 2012, Winchester Cathedral launched a £20.5m capital fundraising appeal for conservation of the historic fabric and to transform its outreach and presence in the community. Urgent conservation work is taking place which involves restoration of the presbytery roof, the fine 16th century vault beneath and some unique medieval glass all at high level. The Learning Centre Project, including a new pavilion-style building, now greatly enhances the quality of the Cathedral's outreach children from Hampshire Schools and beyond, as well as enabling all-age learning. New exhibitions at three levels in the Cathedral's stunning South Transept will decode the history of the Cathedral through the people who have inspired and been inspired by it. They will also bring to visitors an exciting encounter with the Cathedral's greatest treasures, including the world-famous 12th century Winchester Bible.

Although the Wessex Learning Centre is, perhaps, the first fully visible result of this capital development, there is much going on behind the scenes, and the work is expected to conclude in summer/autumn 2018.

The project to refurbish the former Education Centre and build the Wessex Learning Centre began in Spring 2014.

Winchester Cathedral and Winchester Cathedral Trust are extremely grateful to the following principal donors to the building of the Wessex Learning Centre

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Hampshire County Council
- Balfour Historic Museum Trust
- Band Trust
- Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation
- Blagrove Trust
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Hampshire Freemasons
- Hillier Nurseries and Garden Centres
- Kirby Laing Foundation
- Rank Foundation
- Sir James Scott Memorial Fund
- Roger Brook
- Thomas Wolf & Margaret Chin-Wolf
- And other anonymous donors

Fundraising for all of the projects continues and £1.5m remains to be raised at this point.

Further information on the projects is available at www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk