

INFORMATION SHEET

The Rufus Centre, Flitwick TC

<https://www.therufuscentre.co.uk/event-type/meet/>

- **The story of how it came about.**

Timeline from inception to physical delivery.

Who led the creation of the venue?

How was the focus of what the venue delivers determined?

Start-up funding – s106 / fundraised / grants, etc?

The Rufus Centre was built in the late 1980's as a school. The school opened in 1990 but then closed in 1995.

The Centre was then purchased by the Council using a loan in approx. 1998 and officially opened in Nov 1999. The Centre had been boarded up for a couple of years prior to purchase.

At the time, minimal work was carried out to refurbish the centre (windows, carpets changed and some interior decoration)

Prior to the purchase of the Rufus Centre, the Council was based out of a couple of offices from the village hall.

From looking back at archives, it seems that the mayor at the time (along with other Cllrs) had the initial vision for the Rufus centre to be used for Council and business purposes.

- **About the venue itself**

Capabilities / diversity of use / limitations / uniqueness / location within the town

Breadth of activities delivered

Open 7 days a week / or not

Usage / audience or visitor numbers – how far do people travel / reach of venue

What's great about it / not so great – would avoid if doing it again

There are 5 strands to the Business model:

1. Fully serviced office space (30 offices varying in sizes)
2. Conference & meeting rooms (5 meeting rooms suitable for 8 – 40 people along with our main hall that can seat approx. 250)
3. Functions – Hire of the main hall for weddings etc. We have a canopy to decorate the hall, along with other decorations packages.
4. Events – This is a new addition to the model, that I have introduced since being in post. We now run our own events/themed nights.
5. Rendezvous Café & Bar – Café is open Mon – Sat 0800 – 1600hrs and opens on Friday nights for events.

The centre is also used as the base for the Town Council (approx. 8 offices). We regularly hold “community” events here. The Centre is about 1 mile from the centre of the town and has a car park for approx. 150 cars.

Outside of COVID, we operate 6 days a week, with tenants having 24 hour/7 days a week access.

We have a number of large clients from local authorities, CCG and NHS that travel some distance to use our facilities.

As there are few venues that can cater for 250 people for weddings, we have a number of African/Asian weddings held here.

Currently, our only downside is the limitations with the size. We regularly have a waiting list of tenants. We could also benefit from having an onsite hotel, as the nearest hotel to us is approx. 5 miles.

- **Governance of the venue (business model/ management)**

Owner of venue – outright ownership / peppercorn lease / etc. ?

Community owned / Council owned / stakeholder representation, etc?

How are decisions made – what freedoms or not, are there?

FTC own the venue.

The Business & Facilities Manager has delegated authority for operational matters. We then have a Business Services Committee.

- **Annual running practices and costs**

Core funding – base line budget / is it subsidised (needed) / profit/loss

Staffing levels – employed staff / volunteers – what works best/issues

Building repairs / maintenance / environmental credentials

Marketing / promotions needed

Funding comes from the income generated from the Centre. I have only been in post just short of 2 years, and part of the creation of my role was to improve occupancy and the profit.

Looking back, the Rufus Centre would make approx. £50k profit p/a. income approx. £570,000 vs expenditure of £520,000. This does not include the community value. We have a specific community room that is given free of charge to charitable and community groups. The “Business” does not charge FTC for other types of community events held at the Rufus Centre.

Staff structure:

Business & Facilities Manager x 1

Events Coordinator x 2

Bookings Officer x 1

Customer Support Assistants (set up for events/conferences and meeting rooms/general repairs/help with café & bar etc) x 5

Catering Supervisor x 1

Chef x 1

Kitchen Assistant x 2

Comms & Marketing Officer (splits her time between Rufus and FTC) x 1

- **Other**

Your unique experience

What of the future – expansion / reduction / change?

The vision for the future is to expand on what we have. Look to create a hotel on site, extend the car park, increase tenant's office space.

We have found that we are not necessarily a prime wedding venue (which I think was the original plan). Most wedding are in barns, fields festival themed, which we cannot offer. Most weddings come to us for 2nd time around weddings or Asian/African due to the size of our hall.

Approx. 5 years ago, a housing estate was built next door to us (previously fields). We did have a number of complaints from our events, so we have had to spend large sums of money on soundproofing windows, noise limiting sound systems and monitoring.