

MOUNT WISE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE



YEAR TWO REPORT

April 2025–March 2026

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ZEBRA
collective



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1. Introduction & Summary

Year 2 at Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre (MWNC) has been demanding and very rewarding: a community centre recovery and development project is inherently challenging, and motivation through these challenges, uncertainties and constant contingencies is maintained through recognition of the signs of progress, sometimes small, sometimes dramatic. Our motivation remains high, as these noticeable signs have been steady and many.

Zebra Collective, a Devonport based cooperative CIC, took on the lease of the Centre on 1st April 2024, with an ambition to work with our neighbours and fellow residents to bring the building back into community use.

Year 2 has built significantly on the work of the first year:

- The building and gardens have been improved
- Use of the building has increased significantly – in numbers and in the range of demographics and functions
- Community ownership & shared management of the building and its activities has developed further
- Established partnerships have matured and new partnerships formed.

It's worth noting that there are two distinct foci:

1. *The state of the building, garden and immediate surrounding space:* when we acquired MWNC, all this was in a dilapidated state, thus our launch of a long-term physical development project.
2. *The existence of this community centre – open, welcoming to all, and community-owned:* it was set to close, and had already been in little use for years, thus our launch of a long-term community development project.

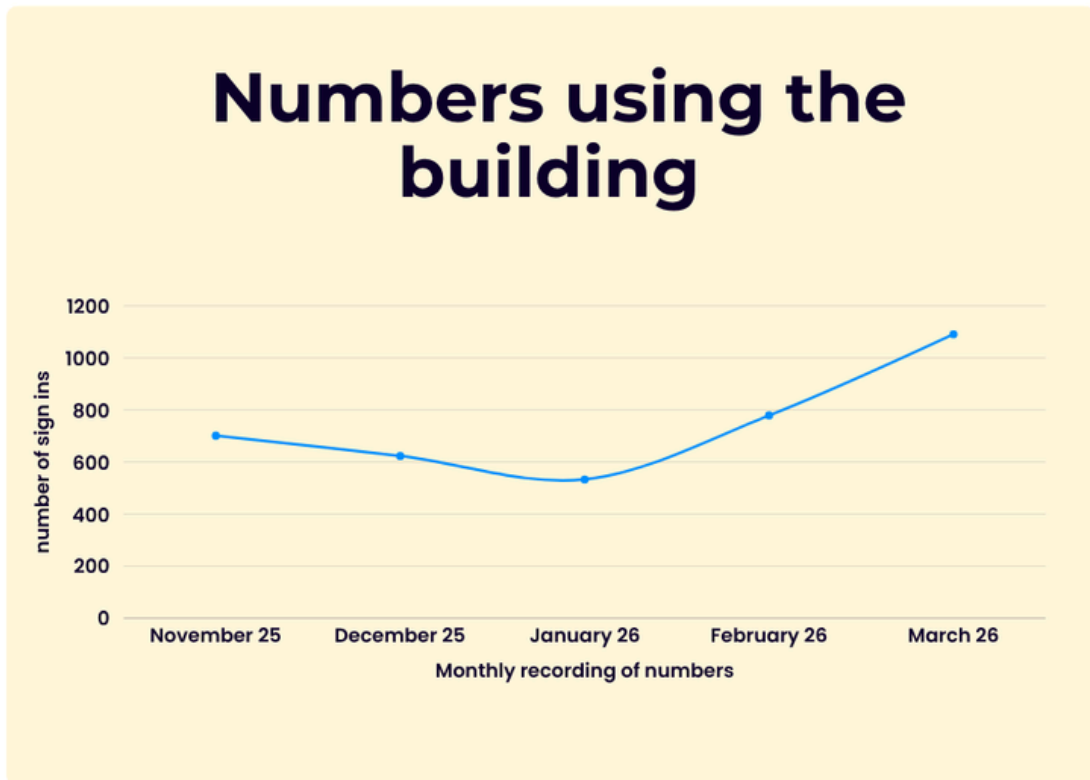
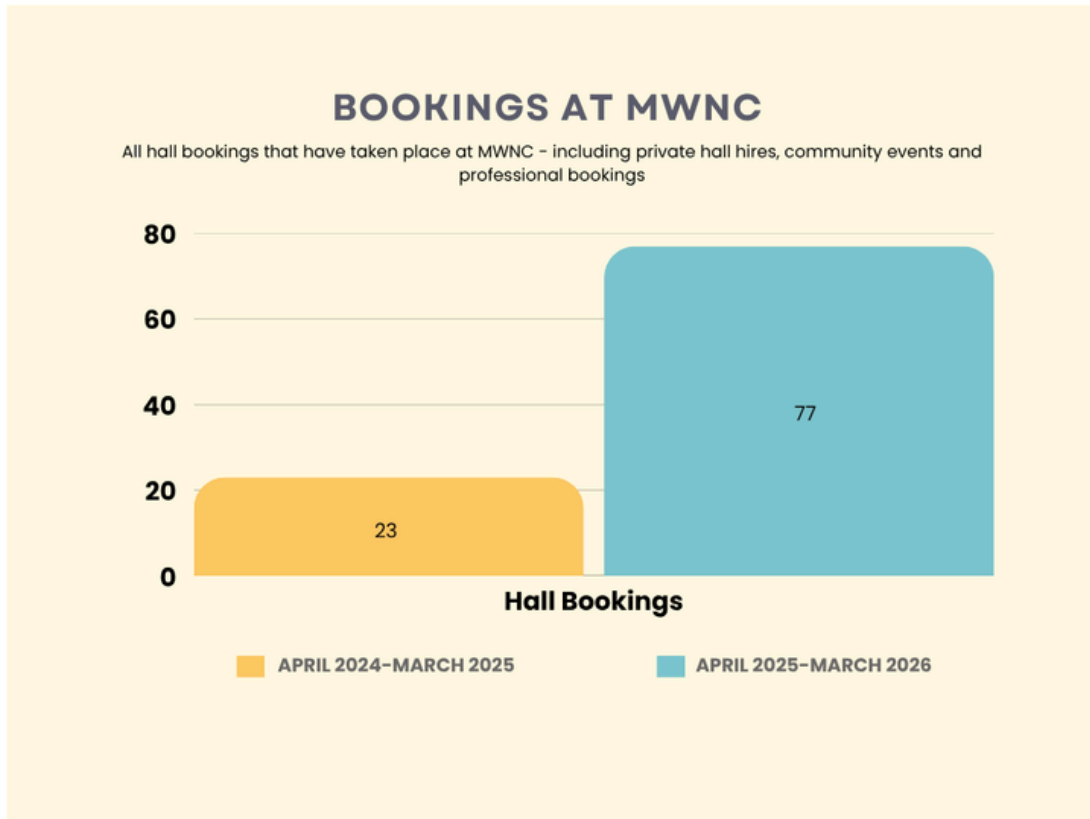
Both projects are explored fully in this report.

In summary:

- The building, garden and surroundings are much improved – key physical developments this year:
- *New windows throughout*
- *Installation of new loft insulation*
- *Soundproofing of a key dividing wall*
- *Securing of major funding for the next stage of building developments*
- *A major garden makeover*

See the report for full detail re all the above – and more.

The Centre's function as a community space has grown markedly this year



To conclude, this has been a second successful year by all measures – re both the physical and the community aspects. And Year 3 looks promising, as we have clear plans – and a good amount of the required funding, for the next phases of development.

2. The fabric of the building

The building was in a very poor state when Zebra took on the lease: there were multiple leaks in the roof and water ingress, a new boiler was needed, the external shutters were jammed shut, the windows, doors and flooring were in a state of disrepair, and the inside and outside of the building needed repainting.

In the second year we have:

- Added loft insulation, as recommended in the energy audit conducted in winter 2024-5. The materials were donated by Bradfords, through SNG's Match My Project scheme (SNG is one of the principal social housing providers in the neighbourhood). The installation was done by Simon, a regular MWNC volunteer. This has made a significant difference in retaining heat over the winter months.
- Secured part funding from Bradfords Building Supplies to replace the front and side doors – these will be installed in June 2026.
- Added a 2nd external noticeboard to publicise MWNC events – fully funded by Bradfords
- Repaired damage to internal walls and ceilings – work done voluntarily by 3 local residents.
- Painted the front exterior with a beautiful mural designed by the local community through a series of workshops and painted by local artist Kate Crawford. This was funded through South West Community Forest as part of the MWNC garden makeover project from autumn '25 – spring '26.
- Removed the old heating system in the corner of the Side Room and installed acoustic panelling on the wall between here and the main hall. The panelling also creates a seamless, more modern look to the centre.
- New carpets added to the 2 smaller side rooms, making these good for small meetings and 1:1 sessions.
- Soft furnishings added to the front office to make the environment nice to work in. Chairs, desk, office chair and a venetian blind to enable privacy when needed.
- Partially cleared the garden space in October 2025, working with Plymouth City College and Princes Trust to de-weed and re-paint the rusted metal fencing.
- Transformed the garden space in a partnership project funded by Community Forest, co-designed with local people and young people from youth club, and delivered with Green Communities. We've planted trees, a mini orchard, created a fire pit, hedging, a wildlife pond, benches, bird boxes and wildflowers.

Impact of this work

We're steadily moving through the building to improve every aspect of the fabric. This makes for a far more attractive, functional community space, one which people feel good to be at. And so they return – and bring their friends. And the recent dramatic improvements to the exterior – the garden, and the front mural and adjacent planters – benefit everyone who passes.

We believe that these improvements will promote hire of the building, and we're already experiencing increased demand – for birthday parties, meetings and events. Rental income is essential to our financial plan, as we work towards MWNC's long-term financial sustainability.

3. Activities at MWNC

In the second year we have held (April 2025 – March 2026):

- The local polling station for the mayoral referendum in July
- Food is Fun CIC – 2x 4-session community-focused cookery courses
- 5x Covid and Flu vaccination clinics over the winter
- Devonport Community Baptist Church has continued to hold their Sunday morning service here
- Slimming World has hired the Centre for 2 sessions a week since September 2025
- Working in partnership with Zebra, ODILs (Open Door Language School) received Devon Community Foundation funding to deliver a weekly community English as an additional language class for women, with creche. This began in January 2025 and continued throughout our 2nd year (and we are in conversations with ODILs re continuation funding)
- The Green Communities team (Plymouth City Council) hired the building to deliver a herb growing workshop
- The city's Community of Reflective Practice for community workers (facilitated by Zebra) ran monthly approx. April – December
- A 'Community Assembly' was held in November, with 25 people present.

In addition, we – Zebra Collective – are continuing to develop a programme of community sessions, events and opportunities at MWNC:

- A weekly youth club for 11–16-year-olds – attended by 30–40 local young people weekly, and a membership of approximately 100.
- A weekly youth club for 8–11-year-olds, launched in February 2025 and, by the end of March attended by around 20 local young people per week.
(90%+ of our youth club members live within a 5-minute walk from the centre)
- We promote youth volunteering, offering young people of secondary school age the opportunity to help out at the primary age club. Through this year 2 young people have taken on this role, and this option is becoming known amongst peers.
- Since September, we've facilitated a 'Youth Wellbeing Peer Mentor' project, a scheme funded by SNG to develop the capacity of 15 young people to look out for their peers and help where necessary. The group has met at MWNC 2–4 times per month. Devising and running 'social action days' is an element of this scheme...
- We held the 'Culture Day' in February '25: our team of Youth Wellbeing Peer Mentors (see above) devised, planned and ran this event, which presented their respective cultures – Polish, Syrian, Sudanese and English/ Plymothian – through food, images, history, music and discussion. A very diverse attendance of around 130 people, principally families, came to this joyful event. The Peer Mentors gained in confidence and their sense of possibility, and immediately began thinking about future events.
- Zebra led the establishment of MWNC Food Coop in January – 20 local households paying £3/ week for a food bag of value approx. £20, sharing responsibility for receiving deliveries, treasure duties and collection.
- A monthly 'Cake and Cuppa' for people affected by cancer, averaging 20 attendees.
- Fortnightly (approx.) 1:1 sessions for people with a Specialist Social Prescriber for people affected by cancer.
- A weekly Community Garden Group, working in partnership with Green Communities and the National Trust.
- A weekly Toddler Group for 0–4 year olds run by local volunteers and funded by Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) and Clarion Housing.
- A monthly Green Devonport Partnership meeting – the partnership brings together organisations who own/steward land in Devonport, local organisations involved in 'green' projects and local people. The partnership works to increase biodiversity and nature connectedness and organises monthly Green Devonport actions in local spaces.



- Fit and Fed youth sessions over the Easter, Summer, and Christmas holidays in 2025-26. These have been attended by 12-15 young people per session – 13 days over these 3 holidays.
- Reggae Nights – quarterly since April, with friend of the Centre DJ Arash Torabi working for free at these popular fundraisers, with attendance of around 50 and steadily growing.
- Welcoming Spaces – the centre was a ‘Warm and Welcoming Space’ over the winter of 2025/6 and was open for 10 hours a week for people to come and have a hot drink, use Wi-Fi and kitchen facilities. There was limited take-up of this; our hope is that in future years the developments here will make for significantly greater use of this offer.
- A Community Easter Event in collaboration with PCH in April 2025 – 70 people attended.
- Halloween ‘Boo Bash’ for families in October 2025, again in collaboration with PCH. Over 100 children and adults attending.
- A community day in June 2025 with bouncy castle and children’s activities, attracting over 150 people.
- Community Christmas party attracting 60+ people.
- A Thank you Event in March 2026, funded by Support the Supporters. Food & drink supplied as an appreciation of our volunteers.

The centre has also been hired for:

- 14 birthday parties
- 6 professional bookings hired by organisations like Shelter and NHS public health.
- Women’s EID Celebration, March 2025, with over 150 attendees.
- Zebra (current workforce of 9 paid staff) are also based at the centre.

Impact of this work

The impact of this work can be captured in the wisdom that, when a familiar community space is opened up to that community, with everyone invited to come in, with their ideas, wishes and strengths, to enjoy the space and to run it together – then everyone benefits (and not just those who come). Zebra’s approach is shaped by this wisdom, along with our strengths-based, trauma-informed, inclusive and reflective approach. The fact that we live here is a further and absolutely key ingredient in the growth in community use and ownership of MWNC – every day, several times a day, we’re in conversations with our neighbours about possibilities at MWNC.

The evidence-based “5 Steps to Emotional Wellbeing”:

1. Connect – with other people and with nature
2. Be physically active
3. Learn new skills
4. Give to others
5. Pay attention to now

This report demonstrates how MWNC – both what goes on here and how the place runs and its culture – serve all 5 steps.

Youth work

Our youth work merits some specific coverage as a case study in the impact of MWNC.

The centre has become a safe place for the 100+ local young people who come to our clubs, many of whom are living in challenging family circumstances, and many in specialist educational provision or in precarious relationships with school. With around 60 young people now attending the clubs each week (and more than 100 current members), and dozens attending our various holiday events,

- YWPM
- Youth volunteering



Toasting marshmallows on the firepit at junior youth club

The centre contributes **to improved wellbeing and mental health for young people locally, reduced anti-social behaviour, and increased community cohesion.**

- English classes contribute to **reduced social isolation, increased community cohesion and increased employability.**
- Cake and Cuppa – these monthly events offer a space for peer support and contribute to **improving wellbeing** for people affected by cancer.
- Events such as the Community Day and Community Christmas provide a space for the wider community to come together, contributing to **increased connection, and reduced social isolation.**
- Cookery sessions are intended to promote **affordable, healthy eating.**
- The Green Devonport Partnership and
- The Garden Group contribute to **increased connection to nature and wellbeing.**

4. Partnerships

Zebra brings a host of well-developed partnerships to the Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre project, and the knowledge of the importance of developing and maintaining partnerships to our work. Partnerships enable us to provide activities to MWNC that local people want; or to jointly deliver activities with other organisations, using complementary skills.

Developing partnerships with organisations helps maximise access to opportunities, in-kind contributions and funding for MWNC. Furthermore, these partnerships enhance our community-building: we use our social capital to 'bridge' local people to opportunities that they might not otherwise be aware of or feel confident to access.

Partnerships of note this year:

Action for Children – the work we began together in February '25, with the new Junior Youth Club, has grown:

- The continuation of this club, attendance at which has grown significantly
- Fran, our key Action for Children link, has for most of this year also attended our Senior Youth Club, bringing her experience and partnership contacts with her – a great asset to both teams
- We partnered to run our first 'Family Club' for 4 weeks in March, with 3 families participating. More are planned for Year 3
- We are moving towards becoming a designated Family Hub satellite site

Clarion Housing – Clarion Housing have, alongside Plymouth Community Homes, funded the Zebra toddler group and parenting courses at Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre.

Clifton Emery Design – this is a long-standing partnership, dating from Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership days – architect John Bird worked with us *pro bono* again this year, to develop plans for major works, including reconfiguration of the building to create an accessible toilet and workable floor space.

Devon Community Foundation – this partnership grew during this 2nd year, most notably with a repeat private donation of £10,000 to support Zebra's work with children and young people.

Green Communities Team (Plymouth City Council) – Zebra is a partner in the Green Communities project, alongside Plymouth City Council, National Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust and Real Ideas. The project aims to increase biodiversity and nature connectedness. Green Communities team members support Zebra’s weekly community gardening and growing sessions and every second youth session.

LiveWest Housing Association – Livewest funded 3 community events this year, and in April ‘25 new windows were installed throughout, with the funding secured from Livewest a few months before.

ODILS Learning Foundation – as mentioned elsewhere in this report, the collaboration continued throughout this year, with Odils providing women-only community English as an additional language classes with a creche.

Nature Neighbourhoods – Zebra was a partner in this national project through RSPB, National Trust and World Wildlife Fund, which concluded in spring. The project supported 18 community organisations across the UK working on nature connectedness. The partnership with these large organisations, and the peer community organisations, proved invaluable in enhancing the development of our nature work.

Plymouth Community Homes – PCH is by far the biggest social housing provider in this neighbourhood. Zebra’s longstanding relationship with PCH developed further this year, with the establishment of a more formal partnership.

SNG (Sovereign Network Group) – the principal benefits of this growing partnership this year were the building-related donations (see Fabric of the Building, p.5) and the Youth Wellbeing Peer Mentor programme.

University of Plymouth – Zebra has a long-standing relationship with PenARC, the Health and Care Research Collaboration at the University. Through this, Zebra as a community partner was a partner in a successful bid to the Mental Health Research Grant, the 5-year project launching on 1st April ‘26, with our role including overseeing a project to offer local people the chance to become community researchers.

Waterside PCN – a valuable relationship has been developed with the local Primary Care Network in the last year, through Zebra’s hosting of a 3-year Test and Learn Community Cancer Champions project, funded by Macmillan Cancer Support. The local CN is a partner in the project; this link has led to vaccination clinics being held at the Neighbourhood Centre, and a ‘Feel Good Friday’ health event, which attracted over 350 people to the Centre.

5. Engagement with local people

Zebra has been based in Devonport for its entire 23 years, and Marc Gardiner, a Zebra founder, has lived here for 30 years. He's been involved in youth work in Devonport for much of this time, and chaired Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership for 9 of its 10 years up to its conclusion in 2011.

Other members of Zebra also live in Devonport. The organisation is deeply embedded here through this combination of being residents and working and volunteering locally.

This 2nd year has seen a big increase in the number of local people active at the centre:

- 10 volunteering at the youth clubs &/or toddler group
- 2 young people who attend Senior Youth Club volunteering at Junior Youth club
- 12 in the Garden Group
- Several working on building repair and maintenance

We actively seek out conversations with our fellow residents here, using all our events and sessions as opportunities to have conversations with local people about what they want to see happening here – and, importantly, how they want to be involved.

Our engagement with people is always on this basis – the aspiration that people will both co-design and co-deliver activities at the centre. We're strengths-based, curious about and responsive to what matters to local people, recognising the contributions they can make and supporting them to volunteer or develop activities at the centre.

Early in 2026 Zebra decided to change its rules as a worker cooperative to incorporate volunteers – that is, anyone volunteering with us, e.g. at MWNC, is eligible to become a member of Zebra Collective, giving them a voice re all aspects of the organisation.

Of course, we understand that not everyone is interested in or has the capacity right now to 'get involved', so just getting the word out about what's happening at the centre is essential.

Awareness of MWNC

We've continued to work to publicise the fact that MWNC is open. We now have at least 1 event/activity happening every day at the centre (see MWNC timetable of activities) apart from Saturdays which is popular for private hall hire (birthday parties and larger events). In March, all Saturdays were booked – so the building was open every day.

Our Facebook page is also steadily growing, and we were at 630 followers at the end of March.

Volunteering/Employment

Zebra has continued to develop the relationships with those who help out here. The work of one volunteer – the 39-year-old male mentioned in last year's report – has continued consistently with the now 17-year-old with severe learning disabilities who attends our youth club. This relationship with the lad and his family has strengthened further through this year.

2 local people, both of whom are single parents who've been unemployed long term, have continued as regular, consistent volunteers at the youth clubs and toddler group. Through this year, both have, with our support, undertaken Youth Focus South West's Youth Worker training, and are near to completion.

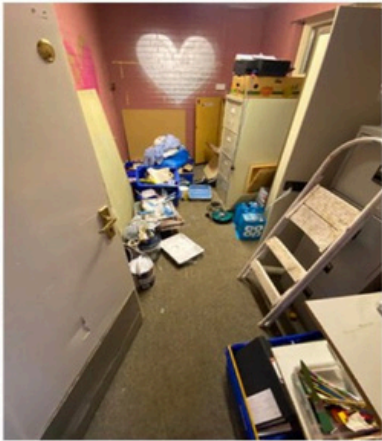
Co-designing and co-managing

Zebra's aim is to bring the Centre back to life, using the collective resource of local people – and this principle has again driven our work in the second year. Our new toddler group was suggested by, co-developed and is co-delivered with local women. Our youth club sessions are co-designed with the local volunteers that work at the clubs. Our evening events are co-managed with local people.

One notable co-design project is the garden and outdoor space transformation. With funding from Community Forest, input from an Open University designer and Green communities, members of the Centre's garden group, other Centre users and members of youth club took part in a 4 month process to design and deliver a transformed garden space. This included the design of the spaces but also making decisions about the budget – what to spend the budget on – and which exact products to choose. The culmination was a Community Planting Day in March 2026, with local people leading activities alongside Zebra, Community Forest and Green Communities.

87 people came along and helped us to transform the garden. The gardening group has gone from strength to strength in their space – and the youth club young people are very much enjoying the fire pit that they so desperately wanted!

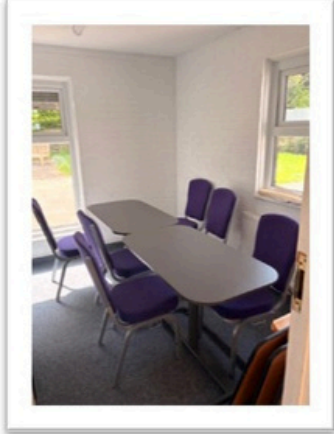
Before...



2024-25



Now...

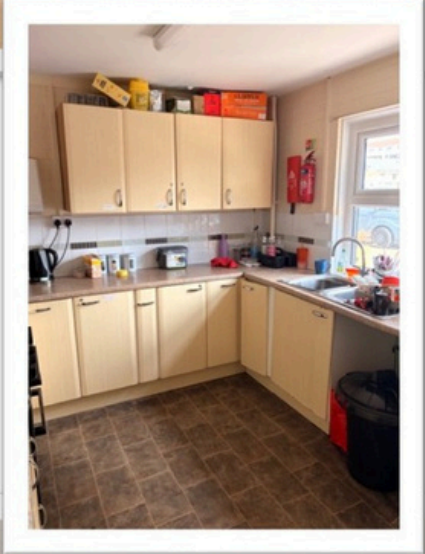


Foyer

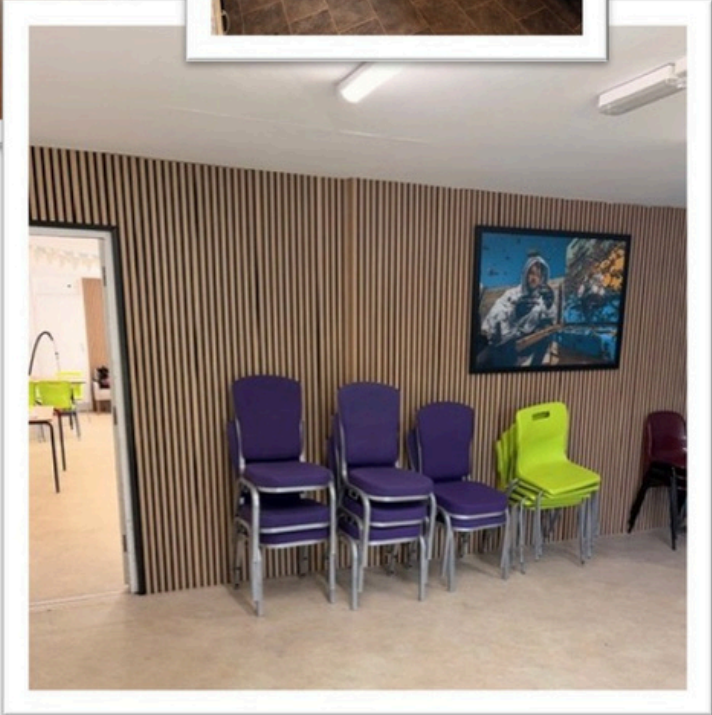




Main hall space



Side Room





**MWNC Garden
space:
Fruit trees,
raised beds,
wildlife pond
and firepit.**



6. Plans for Year 3

Our Year 3 plans are coming together:

In June, we will be developing an accessible toilet along with a second toilet, ensuring that our space is welcoming for everyone. Additionally, we aim to enhance the natural light in the main area by integrating our smaller side room and craft cupboard.

Finally, we plan to establish access from the foyer to our side room, allowing two events to occur simultaneously. With both hall spaces connected to the toilet and kitchen facilities, this will provide greater flexibility for the community and Zebra staff.

We've been kindly supported by the Asda Foundation to create the accessible toilet and we've raised most of the funding, but we're still £10,000 short.

If you're able to support, even a small amount will help and will be much appreciated.

Scan the QR code below, which will take you to our GoFundMe page, where you can find out more!

