



■ **TARGET ACHIEVED:** Bryan Wardley and Rachel Faulkner are among local residents who got together to buy the lease on St Margaret's Institute from St John's College Order no: 310308925. Picture: Antony Moore

## North Oxford centre is now safe

THE FUTURE of a North Oxford community centre is safe "for the foreseeable future" after residents clubbed together to buy its lease.

Eight hundred people contributed to a £500,000 appeal to buy the 999-year lease of St Margaret's Institute from St John's College. The sale secures the long-term future of the centre, in Polstead Road.

Appeal chairman Ben Simpson said: "It's extraordinary. We raised the last few thousand pounds just days before we needed to give St John's the cheque.

"The local community now has this wonderful building for the foreseeable future. This was a heart-warming example of how an appeal for an enormous sum of money can energise the whole community."

The fundraising campaign was launched in March 2004 after the college agreed to sell the lease for

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£400,000. The remaining £100,000 is to be spent refurbishing the building.

Appeal treasurer Bryan Wardley said: "We are thrilled. I am also very relieved because it has been a hard slog."

Mr Wardley said the centre filled a gap between Jericho and the Ferry Centre in North Oxford, and served a population of about 8,000.

He added: "The great thing

about this appeal, and raising this money, is that it has enabled the older members of the community to amalgamate very strongly with people who have moved into the 2,000 new homes which have been built."

Throughout the appeal, a total of 32 fundraising events were held, and 100 people pledged £1,000 each.

The appeal was backed by Oxford City Council's north area committee, which contributed £63,000 towards the total.

The lease has been held in trust by St Margaret's Church, in St Margaret's Road. Previously the centre was on a short-term, commercial rate lease, which would have made it unviable for a voluntary committee to run for the community.

Nearby residents and friends of the institute contributed more than 75 per cent of the money raised in the appeal.