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Members of the steering group for The Exchange thanked stonemasons Simon Hares and Kelvin Prior (centre front) for their work on the external walls, joined by site manager Barry Chinnocks (second left). *RH picture.*

Thanks for a special building

A NEW community centre for Sturminster Newton is taking shape on the site of the town's old corn exchange situated on the old livestock market site.

The stone external walls are finished for The Exchange, a meeting place that will replace Sturminster Hall and become a multi-functional venue for the area. Although still clad in scaffolding in the massive development of houses and shops where the livestock market used to be, the building is turning heads with its imposing circular front.

On Monday the steering group behind the project, so impressed with the first phase, made an unusual gesture by thanking the stonemasons responsible for the work even though the building will not be ready until July.

Around a dozen masons from John Loving worked on the walls, which are built out of Marnhull stone, and the steering group did not want their efforts to go unrecognised.

"One of the things often missed as we thank the architect and the main contractor, is the tradesmen whose hands and skills turn plans and drawings into a real building," said Robert Cowley for the steering group. "By the time the building is completed, many of these workers have moved on and are no longer here to thank.

"The curved walls, window arches, and exposed brick inside The Exchange already make it a striking building. We have been impressed by the attention to detail and the sheer quality of the workmanship."

Costing £3million, the Exchange will have town council offices, a community office, and numerous rooms for clubs and societies to meet. There will be under-floor heating throughout, and a ground source heat pump for most of the heating.

Local building firm Hammonds is overseeing the project, along with the adjacent super-market and medical centre.

"We wanted the building to be special, unusual, and made of local materials as far as we could," Mr Cowley added. "We are getting the building we wanted and it will be here for hundreds of years."

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