

ST. MICHAEL'S COMMUNITY ROOMS PROJECT UPDATE JUNE 2020

The Town Council, volunteers and the Parochial Church Council (PCC) have been working on this possibility for over two years now. Differing parties have led at different stages to choose an architect, in working through various plans and agreements which moved from Framlingham Town Council (FTC) being responsible and leasing the land;, through to the PCC taking responsibility with assistance from East Suffolk Council and in partnership with FTC. All parties believed we were working with a fairly secure budget of £840k to cover the whole build and new equipment and this figure became the basis for the agreements between the parties.

1. The Investigative Work before Planning Permission

Since the exhibition of the plans in January 2020 the PCC has been working hard with the architects, structural engineer, quantity surveyor and other experts. We had been hopeful that a Planning Application would be made in April. However a number of serious and costly issues have arisen:

Because of topography, possible archaeology and tree protection the foundation and groundwork costings became considerably more expensive than had been budgeted for.

Additional professional fees for the above issues were necessary and for investigating the Mechanical and Electrical engineering aspects. These included environmental concerns including 1 or more Electric Vehicle Charging Points now required by the County Council.

The initial contingency provision was substantially less than would normally be built in to initial costings.

The car parking surface will be more expensive in order to protect the trees.

It became clear that the architect's view that £840,000 would be sufficient needed to be fully tested before a Planning Application was made.

In April the PCC received the first total build and furnishings cost of £1.36m covering the whole build and new furnishings – an increase of 62% which was not forecast. We were advised by the Architect and Quantity Surveyor that it might be possible to reduce the costs by reviewing all areas, reducing the size of the total building and simplifying the specification. The PCC asked them to proceed with this.

2. Revisions to Expectations

A new plan – Option 3 – is attached which shows a simpler building with a hall that accommodates up to 112 seated (previously 120), a meeting room with space for 16 seated around a table (previously 20), smaller office, the kitchen and downstairs store are about

the same size. The heating would be by gas boiler and radiators. The specification now includes treated softwood weather boarding rather than Rheinzink wall cladding.

On 29th May we found out this has reduced the total to £1.067m. The work on car parking surfaces, renewing tables and chairs would all have to be delayed and come out of the income of the new hall when they would be deemed as new work to an existing build and so VAT would have to be paid on these works.

3. The Position the PCC finds itself in

The PCC finds itself in a very difficult position. It was making steady progress towards the £70,000 funding to match the Town Council Grant. But finding new sources of generous external grants is increasingly difficult. Covid 19 means that many large funders are now concentrating on funding projects directly linked to the pandemic. Accordingly a building which is trying to encourage community growth and interaction may not be a priority for grants in the next few years. Another effect of the pandemic is that the PCCs income is at present down by about 50%. The PCC will not have access to central Church funding as this will be focussed on supporting congregations through the cash shortages.

The PCC has been considering its next steps. There does not seem to be any significant scope to reduce the size or specification of the building further without prejudicing the very purposes for which it is aimed or affecting the ability to gain planning permission.

The PCC is willing to consider increasing its fund raising contribution by about £50,000. Realistically the PCC knows it would be unable on its own to raise the full £230,000 over its existing commitment to meet the new target of £1.07m. However willing it has limited resources, the current funding climate and its other charitable purposes all affect its ability. Alternatively launching a large appeal would delay any building and lead to increased costs again.

4. Suggested way forward

Given the partnership and agreement that the PCC has with the Town Council on this project it is important that we explain the situation that we are in and the process we have gone through in order to reduce the costs. To that end PCC representatives would like to request a meeting with the Council or appropriate sub-committee to discuss whether the present 3rd option plans are good to proceed with and whether PCC, Councils and Town as a whole can find the additional funding.

Mark Sanders 2nd June 2020