

Town Council and St Michael's PCC work together on St Michael's Rooms Project

At the Framlingham Town Council meeting on 7th June the possibility of developing St Michael's Rooms was discussed and it was agreed to develop this option with the Parochial Church Council (PCC). The proposal envisages the Town Council purchasing the lease for the land that the current hall stands on from the PCC and then building a new community owned hall to replace the existing building. Funding for the work is dependent on a successful bid for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds from SCDC. This bid has now been submitted as part of a wider application for funds also covering parking and road safety measures.

The development has continued to be explored by Councillors, PCC Reps and volunteers who have formed a new Working Group to continue the work. The project is still in development and many details are not yet settled, so no decision has yet been made on whether to start a rebuild. However, here is an outline of the where the project is now.

A structural survey has indicated that although the existing building is safe, it would be better value to rebuild rather than repair the existing structure. The kitchen has recently been re-equipped, and it is intended that this new equipment will be reused to save some money on the new Hall.

Ownership of the land is complex and how it is leased is being investigated. The interested parties include the Town Council, the PCC, the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Pembroke College Cambridge, Suffolk Coastal District Council and residents. The necessary searches and surveys will take some months to complete. As a principle it was agreed that the PCC should not lose out financially from the project and equally it should not make a profit. Any final lease will reflect this principle.

With a view to rebuilding the hall a number of companies have been approached to provide proposals for a build design for the building. The results of this will be shared with the public when we have made further progress and know what is possible on such a sensitive site in an important Conservation Area. The design brief included that the scale of the hall should remain largely the same as the present building and will continue to deliver a similar facilities as the current building. The range of purposes for the hall is being worked at but our initial list includes support groups and charity meetings, health clinics, wellbeing opportunities (including organisations presently using the Rooms), interest groups, disability groups, parent and family groups, education groups and leisure learning, pre school and after school clubs...

We recognise the skills and insights the working group bring but given the complexity of the project it is also necessary to have professional legal and other advice. At present this remains an exploration with the Town Council, PCC and volunteers discovering the scope of the project

If residents especially those local to the site have any concerns they are welcome to contact Eileen Coe at the Town Council and these can be fed into the discussions. It is planned to have some open events, hopefully in the autumn, once we have more clarity around key issues such as design, lease arrangements and the wider planning framework surrounding the project. We shall keep everyone informed as we develop the project. The minutes of the Working Group meetings will be published on the Town Council website and regular updates are planned.

Gary Kitching Chair of Town Council and of Working Group
Mark Sanders Chair of St Michael's PCC