

Report by Framlingham PCC on St Michael's Community Rooms for Framlingham Town Council 6th August 2020

Introduction

At the Town Council meeting on 4th June it was reported that costs for this project as then currently designed were very substantially in excess of the budget of £840k.

Over the last two months further work has been undertaken to understand the reasons for this mismatch and to amend the design to reduce the deficit whilst maintaining the integrity of the project.

Discussions have taken place between PCC and Town Council representatives together with Councillor Cook.

This report sets out the current situation as seen by the PCC and the assistance we would appreciate from the Town Council

Building Design

Attached is a revised layout (that has been on the Town Council website for some time) for SMCR that enables significant cost savings to be achieved whilst still providing a substantial Hall that can accommodate well over 100 people, a meeting room that can seat 16 people together with a good sized kitchen, toilets and storage space. The floor space of the building has been reduced, bringing significant cost savings, primarily by a reduction in general circulation space and more efficiently located storage. The fitting out of the building has been looked at critically and various changes made which do not affect the use of the building. The wall cladding of the building is proposed to be timber rather than zinc sheeting. Only part of the car park will be resurfaced: disabled spaces plus the driveway through only.

Further exploration of the drainage and M&E elements of the building is taking place to see if more cost effective provision can be secured.

The current cost estimate for the project, including a £50k contingency, is £1.067m. which is £227k higher than the budget of £840k

Budgeting

Analysis of the original budget compared with the recent costings has been undertaken to understand why the two are so different

We have looked in detail at the makeup of the original £840k budget that FTC agreed with the architect.

It is apparent that the last cost estimates from Jackson Coles (the architect's then Quantity Surveyor) of construction and demolition, when combined with fees, furniture, a contingency plus other disbursements such as planning fees, totalled in August 2018 around £940k, i.e. £100k over the budget determined just two months previously. The architect assured all parties that cost reductions could be achieved to meet the budget but no further cost analysis was then undertaken.

Additionally the original cost estimates for drainage and foundations of the building made no allowance for the local site conditions. The presence of substantial mature trees close to the building and the archaeological sensitivity of the site has meant that significantly more expensive foundations and drainage

provision has had to be made to comply with the Building Regulations - at least £80k more than allowed for.

The M&E costs have also risen significantly based on work by local consultants which now includes the cost of Photovoltaic panels and an electric vehicle charging point that Suffolk County Council standards require.

The quality of finishes of the building were also of a high standard that the original costings do not seem to have reflected.

The time that it has taken to bring this project to its current stage has also resulted in extra costs due to inflation.

Because a number of the above matters have now to be included in the project it is inevitable that the scheme costs have to rise. Final costs will only be known when the work is tendered but working with our professional team, including a local Quantity Surveyor, the PCC believes that the budget of £1.067m is appropriate given the local conditions.

The PCC is aware from the negotiations on the legal agreement that it entered into with the Town Council on funding, that compliance with the provisions of the 1976 Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act is essential in considering grant aid.

The PCC's Quantity Surveyor has looked in some detail at the current budget costing and calculates that £276,870 of the build costs are for "fitting out" which would accord with the wording of the legal agreement as key to being fundable by FTC. The fitting out enables the building to provide recreational facilities for the town. On that basis the provisions of the 1976 Act should therefore not be an impediment to FTC giving further funds to the project. The biggest elements of the £276k are some £136k on Mechanical and Electrical Services, £47k for flooring throughout the building, £31k for the panelling in the main hall, £15k for fixtures and fittings in the kitchen together with storage cupboards and blackout blinds, and £17k for doors partitions and other fixtures.

It is difficult to envisage how the PCC could raise the whole of the extra £227k needed to fund the project and the help of the Town Council is requested. Given that the project appears to have been underfunded by some £100k when the Town Council passed the lead for the project to the PCC the help of FTC in providing additional funding would be most appreciated. It is requested that the Town Council funding contribution is the same as it was going to contribute when it made the CIL bid to Suffolk Coastal i.e. £126k of local CIL money (rather than the £70k in the legal agreement with the PCC) and support the use of £14k FDDT money for the project.

This would enable the PCC to consider a somewhat more realistic target of future fundraising needed for the new Rooms to be built – a further £157k greater than the contribution of £70k budgeted – to include grant aid from other Charities and East Suffolk Council, fundraising and donations.

Benefits of SMCR

In January when the public exhibition was held over 180 people attended and support for the project was very enthusiastic. Only one member of the public completed a comment form objecting to the development. Most responses were very enthusiastic both about the design and the facilities it can offer.

Both at the exhibition and at other times a wide range of social and recreational organisations have

expressed a strong interest in using SMCR ranging from the Film Club to the Art club , as well as continuing use by groups such as the Bridge Club and Coastal Leisure Learning.

Although support for SMCR may inevitably not be universal in Framlingham the PCC believes the project has widespread support in the town reflecting both the longstanding presence of a community facility for the town on this site but also the need for such a facility given the gradual loss over the years of many of the town's other community facilities such as the Assembly Rooms, the Conservative Club and the British Legion.

The town has not managed to bring to completion many attempts to deliver a new community building in the centre of the town and it would be hugely regrettable if this opportunity was also to be lost. The existing St Michael's Rooms is in a poor structural state so its future is not assured.

The PCC representatives would welcome the opportunity to meet with FTC councillors to discuss the matters raised in this report and questions they might have.