

The main business of the Reading Room Trustees continues to be the renovation project. We are sorry this is taking a long time and share your frustration at the time required to achieve a clear plan. The Reading Room renovation is a large and complex project and we are continuing to carry out the research and due diligence necessary to ensure that we meet the needs communicated in your feedback and achieve the value for money that we all seek. In moving the project forward to this point, we have now reached an important milestone.

In summary:

By October 2018 we had received builder's quotes in the region of £250,000 – £300,000 compared with an original estimate of £150,000 which had been given when we only had layout plans for the project. The quotes were produced against detailed requirements which included some changes to the original plan, also a number of the elements were to a high specification. All of that, together with a substantial increase in material and labour costs, resulted in this unexpected large increase in cost.

A one-off grant from Garfield Weston's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fund had the potential to overcome the cost difference, but despite a huge effort from the Trustees in preparing the submission, the grant was oversubscribed 200 times and our application was unsuccessful.

We were then advised by one of the builders that we would be wise to consider knocking down the existing hall and do a completely new build. It would be a simpler, more definable and less risky option and allow us to have a modern fit for purpose building AND no VAT would be payable.

At around the same time the Parish Council offered to support the project with a much increased Public Works Loan (PWL) of up to £250,000 if we could demonstrate that the village supported this method of funding. This will be done through a further village consultation.

We investigated the rebuild option and applied for pre-application advice from Cotswold District Council in January this year. In April we were informed that the Conservation Officer was very much against the rebuild option because of the historic significance of the current building for Shipton.

We have further investigated the cost and likelihood of success in challenging the Conservation Officer's lack of support. To do this we would have to have an architect draw up plans for a new building and submit these as a planning application with the assistance of conservation planning consultants. This is likely to cost around £10,000 and will take several months to pursue. It would be essential that we can demonstrate the wholehearted support of the village. There is, of course, still no guarantee that we would be successful.

We are currently meeting with the builders who provided the quotes for the scheme for which we do have planning permission – i.e. the renovation and extension. We are looking at scaling back some of the highly specified elements of the build and also attempting to eliminate any risk associated with the renovation elements of an old building such as ours. We need to reach a position where the builders will be able to give us a fixed price quotation, within a budget that we will be able to afford.

We are looking to remove all provisional sums from the quotations. We will appoint a structural engineer to evaluate the plans and specify what needs to be done in terms of foundation work etc. We are also reviewing the drains scheme and speaking with heating specialists to achieve the greenest and most cost effective way of heating and lighting the building.

Coincidentally, a new Village Hall Improvement Grant fund, announced by the government in the November budget, opened in April. This scheme, managed by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), will fund up to 20% of costs which would attract VAT for capital projects costing between £50,000 and £375,000.

So, if successful, we could secure the VAT portion of the Refurbishment project. This would remove the VAT free benefit of the knockdown and rebuild option. We have submitted our stage 1 application for this grant with assistance from GRCC (Gloucestershire Rural Community Council). We believe we are in a much stronger position to be successful as this grant is specifically targeted at community buildings run by trustees (v Parish Councils) and who are in a position to start the project within the next 12 months.

We are now at a point where we require input from the village because whichever option is pursued will require funding to be raised through a Public Works Loan and for this to be successful, we must be able to demonstrate that the chosen option has the substantive support of the Village.

We will shortly be delivering voting forms to all households and will be asking you to vote on two options:

- Should we spend several months and around £10,000 drawing up plans for a new hall and, with the assistance of planning consultants, challenge the views of the CDC planning department in order to achieve the demolish and rebuild option?

OR

- Should we continue to try to get to a point where we have secured a fixed price quotation from builders for the Renovation and Extension of the existing hall for which we already have planning permission?

This will be the first of 2 consultations – once we have an agreed path, we will hold another consultation when you will be asked whether you support the raising of the Public Works Loan to finance the chosen project which will be properly costed at that time.

We would like to stress that The RR Trustees welcome feedback of any variety and are very happy to answer any queries at any stage of this project – please contact Susan Livesey 01242 821645 or Richard Bromwich 01242 820280 or email us at [shiptonreadingroom@gmail.com](mailto:shiptonreadingroom@gmail.com)